

# **INVERTED ODYSSEYS**

*Shelley Rice, Editor*

**The MIT Press**

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*Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, Cindy Sherman*



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**EDITED BY SHELLEY RICE**

*With contributions by*

**Lynn Gumpert, Lucy R. Lippard,  
Jonas Mekas, Ted Mooney, Shelley Rice,  
and Abigail Solomon-Godeau**

*Also including*

## HEROINES

*A fictional text by*

**Claude Cahun**

*Translated by*

**Norman MacAfee**

**Grey Art Gallery  
New York University  
New York**

**Museum of Contemporary Art  
North Miami**

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## FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Bonnie Clearwater, Lynn Gumpert, and Shelley Rice

*Inverted Odysseys*, both the book and the exhibition, have necessitated traveling not only to distant geographical locations but also to far reaches of the imagination. Publications and shows like these inevitably require substantial efforts and sustained exertions; it has been, in '60s parlance, quite a trip. The title is deliberate: an "odyssey," the dictionary affirms, refers to intellectual and spiritual quests as well as to the Homeric saga about Odysseus's epic wanderings and adventures.

The show's genesis—at least as a kernel of an idea for an exhibition—began in Paris in the summer of 1995 when Lynn Gumpert visited the first retrospective of the work of Claude Cahun at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Anyone who has seen firsthand the mysterious and compelling photographs by this recently rediscovered artist knows their magic, knows how they seduce you, drawing you into miniature and seemingly disparate universes. Assuming the directorship of New York University's Grey Art Gallery in February 1996, Lynn immediately proposed that art historian and photography critic Shelley Rice cocurate a solo show of Cahun's work for American audiences. It was Shelley who suggested that including the photographs and films of Maya Deren and Cindy Sherman would allow new insights into the oeuvres of all three artists, identifying similarities and highlighting differences. Bonnie Clearwater, director of North Miami's Museum of Contemporary Art, joined the team in May 1998 as a coorganizer, not only hosting the show in Florida but also contributing substantially to its very existence.

This book is intended to function both independently and as a catalogue to the exhibition of the same name. Neither endeavor could have been accomplished without the enthusiastic support of Cindy Sherman; the Jersey Museums Service, which houses Claude Cahun's papers and the most extensive holdings of her works; and the individuals and institutions responsible for Maya Deren's estate. Cindy generously gave not only of her time but also her permission to show and reproduce some working Polaroids, contact sheets, and props she has used in her remarkable self-transformations. Her assistant, Susan Jennings, cheerfully rummaged in the drawers and closets of Cindy's studio to locate those items appearing in specific photographs; we appreciate greatly her patience and good humor. Likewise, Tom Heman and Jeff Gauntt from Metro Pictures helped procure and lent key works. We are thrilled that Rei Kawakubo is not only lending dresses that Cindy wore for the *Comme des Garçons* photos but has also helped install them; our thanks to her and to Miki Higasa.

Louise Downie, curator of art, and Neil Mahrer, conservator, along with then—assistant curator Claire Follain at the Jersey Museums Service, have been a delight to work with and were all most hospitable during Lynn's and Shelley's trips to the Channel Islands. The late Chere Ito, executor of Maya Deren's estate, diligently located negatives and facilitated our research with great interest and care; Catrina Neiman and Tavia Ito carried on after Chere's untimely death. Jonas Mekas, Robert Haller, Oona Mekas Goycoolea, and Arunas from the Anthology Film Archives, and the *Legend of Maya Deren* collective, along with Dr. Howard Gotlieb, Director of Boston University's Department of Special Collections (which is home

## FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

to much of Deren's estate), allowed us to make film stills, print negatives, and borrow extant photographs from their archives: we are indebted to all for their enthusiasm. Equally supportive and a major lender was Alexander (Sasha) Hammid, and many thanks are due to Isaac Rivera, who restored Maya's negatives and printed the black-and-white shots of Haiti. Other lenders (some anonymous) also agreed to part temporarily with cherished works. They include the Eli Broad Family Foundation; the Foundation to Life; Philip and Beatrice Gersh; Paula Kassover; Robert Kitchen; Monique Knowlton; Barbara and Richard S. Lane; Richard and Ronay Menschel; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes, France; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; PaineWebber Group Inc.; Norman and Norah Stone; Leslie Tonkonow Artworks and Projects; and Zabriskie Gallery. We greatly appreciate their generosity.

Such projects are also costly. We are extremely grateful to the National Endowment for the Arts; The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.; Francie Bishop Good and David Horvitz; and the Abby Weed Grey Trust for providing the funding to make both the show and the book a reality. Yves Mabin of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs furnished a grant to translate Cahun's remarkable manuscript "Héroïnes." Pierre Buhler and Estelle Berruyer of the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in New York gave support—moral and financial—from the very beginning.

Projects like this not only promote dialogue in the larger community but also benefit the individuals who work on them by expanding friendships and respect. We are very grateful to the distinguished authors who contributed their varied insights into this rich topic: again, Jonas Mekas, along with Lucy Lippard, Ted Mooney, and Abigail Solomon-Godeau. Likewise, Norman MacAfee, who translated "Héroïnes," and Erin Donnelly, who compiled the artists' biographies and exhibition histories, deserve our grateful acknowledgment. At The MIT Press, we were fortunate to work with multitalented pros such as Roger Conover, Julie Grimaldi, Jim McWethy, and Sandra Minkinen. Photographer Phyllis Galembo contributed her knowledge and expertise (with her usual flair), arranging and shooting Cindy's props for the illustrations.

Numerous other individuals advised us on various aspects of this complex show. Chief among them were Jennifer Blessing, Karen Love, Sandra Phillips, Leslie Tonkonow, and Virginia Zabriskie. The relatively tiny but remarkably enthusiastic staffs at both the Grey Art Gallery and the Museum of Contemporary Art have proven, once again, that big is not necessarily better. At MoCA, Kevin Arrow ably arranged the shipping and supervised the preparation of the installation, which Shahreyar Ataie expertly aided in executing. Appreciation is also owed to Karen Halpern for managing the expenses and to Stacey Merren for her creative educational programs. At the Grey, Frank Poueymirou strictly but gently oversaw the budget and spearheaded funding possibilities; Michèle Wong skillfully negotiated complicated loans, attended to the framing and matting, and arranged the international shipments; Chris Skura diligently directed, with the assistance of Jason Rosenthal and a talented crew, an ambitious installation; Lucy Oakley read the manuscript with a discerning eye; and Sabina Potaczek successfully juggled the myriad of organizational logistics. Interns Claire Holroyd, Mike Regan, Delphine Rubin, Melanie Schiff, and Katherine Smith capably assisted at various stages of the production of both the show and this publication.

Again, our heartfelt thanks to all, and we hope you enjoy the journey.

Color snapshot of Cindy Sherman (left) and friend,  
c. 1966



## INTRODUCTION

Lynn Gumpert

A framed snapshot occupies a prominent place on a crowded desk in Cindy Sherman's studio. Two girls pose side by side on a wide tree-lined suburban street reminiscent of the archetypal American towns that were featured in fifties television sitcoms like *Leave it to Beaver*. Yet the girls do not wear the expected pedal pushers and tee shirts. Instead, they are garbed in matronly suits and draped with costume jewelry. Not content simply to don grown-up clothes and accessories, they also adopt the hunched-over postures of the "little old ladies" they are pretending to be.

This seemingly unassuming family memento reveals much more than that most children, including Sherman, who is seen on the left, like to "play dressup." According to current pop psychology, wearing grown-up clothes helps children to learn adult demeanor. By playing the roles of grown-ups in make-believe situations, youngsters not only mimic the behavior and attitude of their elders but gradually assume them. Moreover, the fact that it is a snapshot, like the kind most of us possess of ourselves as children, testifies to the important role that photography plays in documenting our lives. Indeed, family photo albums contain treasure troves of information about cultural mores of the individuals and societies they depict; they are readymade textbooks waiting to be decoded.<sup>1</sup>

Cindy Sherman, as we now know, pushed dressing up to the extreme, making it absolutely essential to her art. Moreover, she also serves as model, photographing herself in the various guises she assumes. Brought to the fore by women in the seventies, autobiography and self-portraiture have become central concerns in contemporary art. Many artists, including Sherman, adopt different personae in the multiple narratives and dramas they construct and invent. The significance of the theatricality in Sherman's art, along with its format—a photograph—now comes into clearer focus.

Photography, as Abigail Solomon-Godeau has noted, is the "privileged medium in postmodern art." Commenting on its pivotal position, she has observed: "As photography has come to mediate, if not wholly represent, the empirical world for most of the inhabitants of industrialized societies (indeed, the production and consumption of images serves as one of the distinguishing characteristics of advanced societies), it has become a principal agent and conduit of culture and ideology."<sup>2</sup> Central to both the social function and the art of photography is role playing. As Shelley Rice delineates in her essay included here, nineteenth-century studio photographers encouraged sitters unaccustomed to facing a camera to adopt theatrical roles and costumes for portraits and *cartes de visite*. In other words, pretending to be someone else provided a template for posing. From the 1880s, when cameras became cheaper and easier to use, photographic portrait studios nearly became obsolete and were reserved for formal occasions such as weddings. Otherwise, people could take pictures of themselves and of their families, capturing "Kodak moments" as they documented their lives, if not for posterity, for their own pleasure.

Sherman's snapshot, then, provides an appropriate introduction to this book and its accompanying exhibition, which we have entitled "Inverted Odysseys." Both look at the oeuvres of three artists whose careers span the twentieth century: Claude Cahun's early self-portraits of the teens and twenties, Maya Deren's films of the forties and fifties, and Sherman's photographs of the seventies, eighties, and nineties. Investigating topical issues of self and identity, both book and exhibition shed new light on the history of photographic portraiture, exposing its theatrical origins. "Inverted Odysseys" focuses on three artists who portray themselves assuming different guises as they act out roles both real and imagined. All three fracture a single, solitary sense of self, instead proposing identity as multiple projections of invented, fictional selves. The very notion of "persona," generally used to denote fictional or literary characters, also invokes theatrical connotations. Its original meaning dates back to ancient, classical theater. Derived from the Latin *per*, meaning "through," and *sonare*, "to sound," the word "persona" designated both the actor and the masks worn in different roles. It was by speaking through the mask that the actor assumed the role.<sup>3</sup> Even when wearing costumes, Cahun, Deren, and Sherman not only reveal their many selves but also uncover an evolving, more fluid concept of identity.

Photography and theater share more than their functions as art forms. Fundamental to both is continual oscillation between illusion and reality. Theater involves a constant play between the artificiality of performance and the real-life presence of individuals enacting fictional events. Photography entails an incessant vacillation between the illusion of total objectivity and the reality of an inevitable subjectivity. Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, and Cindy Sherman all revel in these paradoxes, not only making the fictional real and the real fictional but also rendering the internal external.

Lucy Lippard notes in her essay here that "collage has been the major transformational tool of twentieth-century art, offering a way of arranging the parts to create a new hybrid whole." "Photography," she continues, "and collage/montage have interwoven fates." We can extend her analogy to include exhibitions that, like collages, combine bits and pieces of disparate realities. For the show, "Inverted Odysseys," work by three distinct artists from three different points in time is juxtaposed. The pieces shown here are also necessarily diverse and multidisciplinary. Claude Cahun participated in experimental theater, and many of her striking self-portraits evidently document roles she undertook. Maya Deren was a dancer before she became a filmmaker, and her haunting images of multiple selves are infused with a heightened sense of body-as-subject. Cindy Sherman, like Deren, is fascinated with film and has, herself, made a movie, *Office Killer*. More pertinently, she has not only appropriated cinematic tricks-of-the-trade but those of theater and advertising as well, using, for example, rear-screen projections to create backdrops for her photographs. By exhibiting her working studies, "Inverted Odysseys" emphasizes process. By showing the props, masks, and costumes she uses, the exhibition reveals the *deus ex machina* that creates the illusions.

Cahun and Deren, like Sherman, took dressing up to extremes; for them, it was also an integral part of their lives. Deren, as we learn from Jonas Mekas's contribution here, owned a collection of exotic dresses that she wore at parties or for dancing with friends. As intense in real life as she appears in her films—which are

## INTRODUCTION

among the earliest and most important contributions to American experimental cinema—Deren mesmerizingly acted out many selves, personifying the dramatic roles she had envisioned. Cahun, in addition to performing in avant-garde theater, also maintained closets full of costumes. Like Deren, she often encountered projections of herself within the images she created. Perhaps Cahun's most poignant costume was a disguise of wig and disheveled clothes that she donned when she and her companion, Suzanne Malherbe, distributed anti-Nazi propaganda during the four years of the Channel Islands' occupation by the Germans.<sup>4</sup>

But, as the exhibition and book uncover, it is not just that Cahun, Deren, and Sherman portray themselves in multiple guises that warrants attention. Most remarkable is the absolute *certainty* that they, in all of their various personae, convey. Their transformations, it seems, are complete. They are—at least for that moment—who we see: content and form are joined. Like highly skilled actors, they become the roles they adopt. They make us believe. Cindy's childhood snapshot, we realize, is not only surprisingly prescient of her future profession but uncannily convincing. Clutching a handkerchief and each other, these "little old ladies" are completely believable.

Even as it highlights similarities, an exhibition can also emphasize differences. Just as photography, we now know, is ultimately subjective, so too is any exhibition. "Inverted Odysseys" presents selected works by three artists who, each in her own particular way, employ art to suggest the lack of any one absolute reality, of any one immutable truth. Refusing to adhere to a fixed notion of identity, Cahun, Deren, and Sherman all expose the potential for empowered projections of many-sided selves in multifaceted realities.

## NOTES

1. Pierre Bourdieu with Luc Boltanski, *Un Art Moyen: Essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1965), published in English as *Photography: A Middlebrow Art*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

2. Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Photography After Art Photography," in *Art After Modernism*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York/Boston: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and David R. Godine, 1984), 76.

3. For more personae in contemporary art, see Lynn Gumpert and Ned Rifkin, *Persona*, ex. cat. (New York: The New Museum, 1981).

4. Conversations with Claire Follain, St. Helier, Jersey, Channel Islands, October 1997. For more about Cahun's activities during the Occupation and her subsequent imprisonment, see Follain, "Constructing a profile of resistance: Lucy Schwob and Suzanne Malherbe as paradigmatic *résistantes*," unpublished paper, University of Sussex, 1997.



# INVERTED ODYSSEYS

*Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, Cindy Sherman*



When history  
is what it should be,  
it is an elaboration  
of cinema. . . .  
The true historical  
reality is not  
the datum, the fact,  
the thing,  
but the evolution  
formed when  
these materials  
melt and fluidify.  
History moves;  
the still waters  
are made swift.

—José Ortega y Gasset<sup>1</sup>



## INVERTED ODYSSEYS

Shelley Riee

Some stills emerge from the film of art's history. Frame 1: Johannes Vermeer's *Young Woman with a Water Jug*, 1664–1665 (*fig. 1.1*). A young lady is poised between the objects of her toilette and an open window, in a moment hovering somewhere between early morning and eternity. Seen frontally, but barely swiveling to catch the light that streams in from outside, she is the focal point of a composition remarkable for its balance and harmony. Centrally placed in a domestic interior, her body itself, with its outstretched arms, is the link between the exterior and interior worlds: the open window and the objects—the pitcher, the jewelry box, the pearls, the table and chairs—that furnish the room. Caught in a private moment, this woman has become, for those of us living in the chaos of the twentieth century, an icon of both personal and domestic peace.

But Vermeer's icon is not simply tranquil. This domestic scene is a study of the very complex relationships that link the private to the public, the individual to the larger environment. Serene and beautiful as she is, the *Young Woman with a Water Jug* is actually the still point in a turning world, the center of a vortex that expands outward to include not only the political and social world but the cosmos itself. Vermeer's genre paintings, like those of many of his compatriots, grew out of religious and emblematic traditions that saw the physical world as symbolic of the spiritual one, based as it was on a system of "correspondences" as elaborate as any proposed by the mystic Emanuel Swedenborg or the poet Charles Baudelaire. Washing her hands, this woman enacts a ritual cleanliness that moves her close to godliness; she is bathed in spirit as the mundane objects on her table are bathed in sunlight. Just the way her gesture tran-



Figure 1.1 Johannes Vermeer, *Young Woman with a Water Jug*, 1664–1665, oil on canvas, 18 × 16 in., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Marquand Collection, Gift of Henry G. Marquand, 1889

scends the momentary, she herself transcends the physical. Standing quietly in her room, she merges with the infinite.

Radiating between realities, she resolves within her body—within her self-possession and her solitude—the duality of heaven and earth. But there is more to this picture than that. Enclosed within the confines of domestic space, this woman is nevertheless trapped in the web of history. Compositionally wedged between an open window and a map of The Seventeen Provinces (which seems, in fact, to jut into her very neck), it is clear that this young lady's serenity is provisional. As Lawrence Weschler has pointed out,<sup>2</sup> Vermeer used his paintings to

“invent” a peace that did not exist in the outside world, to carve out a space where he could obliterate, for a time, the Thirty Years’ War, the conflicts between England and the Netherlands, the religious persecutions brought on by the Reformation and the Counterreformation, and the problems with Louis XIV that wracked the lives of his Dutch contemporaries. Through the map and the open window, the ghosts of these unseen catastrophes hover around the edges of this private chamber, insuring that we realize our heroine is balancing more than a water pitcher, more even than earth and heaven. By virtue of her unruffled attention to the mundane and the ritual, this young woman is the guardian not only of the domestic but of interior space itself: the place, whether literal or metaphoric, where the heart and the hearth are indistinguishable. As such, she carries within herself the power to resist, and to transmute, the murderous onslaughts of history.

This harmonious balance between the public and the private, the internal and the external, stands in our cinematic narrative as a moment in time: a proposition, coming to us from seventeenth-century Holland, that the most intimate microcosms of our lives are embedded within the macrocosms of the social and spiritual world. Moving on to frame 2, we allow the still waters of history to race toward nineteenth-century France, and Manet’s *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (fig. 1.2). Painted in 1882, the picture depicts a barmaid, centered in the picture plane, facing frontally. This woman has moved outdoors. No longer enclosed within the walls of the home, she is working in the social environment that only existed as a “felt absence”<sup>3</sup> in Vermeer’s work. Surrounded by an elab-



**Figure 1.2** Edouard Manet, *The Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1881–1882, oil on canvas, 37½ × 51 in., Courtauld Institute of Art

orate still life of bottles, flowers, and fruits, she nevertheless has no relationship to these objects. Unlike the water pitcher, the commodities on the counter do not reverberate with meanings or usage, and exist very blatantly as decor and display—as does she who is trapped among them, as surely as Vermeer’s young lady was trapped in the web of history. Caught in the narrow passage between the bar and a mirror that reflects the night life around her, staring vacantly into space, she is accompanied only by her reflection—and a gentleman caller who may or may not be an apparition.

What has changed here, since Vermeer’s time? What happened when this woman left the house, when the membrane separating her from her social environment dissolved? My proposition is, precisely, that the delicate balance between interior and exterior space is at stake here, in the comparison between these two works. In the world of nineteenth-century Paris, not only the hearth was abandoned, as gas lights and new sidewalks made the City of Light the entertainment capital of the world. While Vermeer inhabited a moral universe that saw the private and the public linked by forces deep within the structure of our most intimate humanity, Manet’s world was one where private space became an incongruous reflection caught within the mirror of public image.

This is obvious in *The Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. The young employee stands alone in the midst of social gaiety. Distracted, isolated, depressed, she too is the still point in a turning world. But whereas the *Young Woman with a Water Jug* meditates peacefully, safe within her own thoughts and her own space, able to internalize and transmute forces much larger than herself from within the stillness of her position, this barmaid’s daydreams serve only to alienate her from her environment—an environment that is in itself a mass hallucination. The embodiment of Parisian social fantasies, those public dreams that fuel the glitz and the frenzy of the night scene, the barscape is glimpsed only within the confines of the mirror, a panoramic overview dominating the background. A trapeze artist sails above the ground; chandeliers are ablaze in a glow of electric light; men and women spin the wheel of fortune, trying their luck in the age-old lotto of love. But we can see this Grand Guignol only in reflection: in a glass, or in her thoughts.

It’s hard to say which, when another woman enters the scene, stage right, in the mirror. It’s another barmaid, presumably the double of our heroine, but younger, plumper, gayer. Neither isolated nor distracted, she engages the world around her, especially a top-hatted gentleman (who should be standing where we are, but isn’t) with whom she strikes up an animated conversation. There’s no way that this plump figure can be the physical double of our lonely friend. Is she therefore the embodiment of her ideal self, her aspirations? Or is the social butterfly the “real” woman, forced by circumstances to continually reproduce ritual gestures of femininity empty of feeling and motivation? The two barmaids are tied together like Siamese twins, an image whose reflection has become dissociated, like Peter Pan’s shadow. Alienated from herself, this young lady has fractured in two, but it is not obvious where the illusion lies, and who exactly is masquerading. Clearly delineated in Vermeer’s painting, the public and private realms, the external



Figure 1.3 Cindy Sherman, Untitled film still (#21), 1978, black-and-white photograph

and internal landscapes, have here become confused: the conflict between the one who dreams and the one who acts is projected on to the picture plane itself, and the mirror of the world is virtually indistinguishable from the mirror of the mind.

Which leads us to Cindy Sherman, projecting our cinematic overview ahead, fast forward, roughly a hundred years. Frame 3 is a photograph, “Untitled Film Still” (#21), from 1978 (*fig. 1.3*). No longer the object of a male painter’s gaze, the woman in this picture is both artist and subject. Seen in black and white, with a demeanor as distracted as the barmaid’s, she is walking through the cavernous spaces of an urban street. Buildings loom above this ingenu, clothed in a tailored suit and ’50s hat, who is visible only from the chest up. She looks off to the right, at some unseen menace, a “felt absence” that casts a pall of anxiety over her young face. The streets of the city, the buildings bathed in shadows, are both a refuge and a threat to this woman alone: who is following her? Will she get away? Why is she in trouble?

But wait a minute, let’s back up here and get a reality check on this situation. These are bogus questions, questions without answers, since in fact the story does not continue, in space or in time, beyond the confines of this frame. A narrative is implied here that can never be completed or resolved: this “film still” is floating in an existential void, as a fragment of a cinematic work that does not exist. But that is not the only incongruity in this image. It seems that this young woman, like Manet’s barmaid, has left the confines of the home to act in the social world—but has she? For all its photographic verisimilitude,



Figure 1.4 Cindy Sherman, *Untitled film still (#48)*, 1979, black-and-white photograph

this work was set up by the artist in her studio: the city itself is only a rear screen projection, a public image illuminating her private wall.

Within this urban *mise-en-scène*, the plot continues to thicken, and the clues continue to amount to nothing. The “menace” off to the right is a “felt absence” without a presence: unlike the Thirty Years’ War, this catastrophe is simply a figment of Sherman’s imagination, a sense of impending doom that has no anchor in the world of events. The eerie conflation of the interior and exterior landscapes is echoed by the lack of distinction between self-expression and cultural expression in her photographs. Recreating, as her own personal artist statement, a role—that of the young, urban working woman—made archetypal in the 1950s by the (male) directors of Hollywood films, Sherman refuses to exercise her option of subjectivity; private points of view, in her works, merge with the public icons of femininity. Unlike Manet’s barmaid, who was splintered by the conflict between reality and illusion, Sherman makes illusion her reality. Donning costumes and props, she walks through the looking glass, straight into Manet’s mirror—and she doesn’t look back at her reflection.

Hers is an inverted odyssey, a journey that takes place exclusively within the confines of the mind (*fig. 1.4*). Like Vermeer’s young woman, this artist remains at home, and her interior space expands to encompass the world. But whereas Vermeer lived at a time when the distinctions between inside and outside, public and private, made sense, Sherman was raised on television, which brings the world, literally, into the living room, inverting what we consider

normal relationships of the near and the far, the personal and the social. Constantly bombarded by images, of elsewhere, of everyone, Sherman's visual experience vastly exceeds her physical experience, indeed begins finally to supersede it. No longer moored in real time and space, Manet's mirror becomes a multicultural and multitemporal mental theater, transforming all history and all geography into a stage set for self-projection. Whereas the *Young Woman with a Water Jug* could transmute the forces of history, Cindy Sherman has chosen to become them.

He said to himself as he walked through a great lonely park: "How beautiful she would be in one of those gorgeous and elaborate court costumes, as, in the soft evening air, she descended the marble stairs of a palace facing broad lawns and lakes! For by nature she has the air of a princess."

Later, passing through a little street, he stopped in front of a print shop, and looking through a portfolio and finding a picture of a tropical scene, he thought: "No! It is not in a palace that

I should like to cherish her dear life. . . . Decidedly here I have found the place in which to live and to cultivate the dream of my life. . . . A lovely wooden cabin by the sea and all around those curious glossy trees. . . . Yes, truly this is the setting I have been looking for."

And a little farther on, as he was walking along a wide avenue, he noticed a cozy little inn. . . . "Really," he cried, "what a vagabond my mind must be to go looking so far afield for pleasure that is so near at

hand. Pleasure and happiness are to be found in the first inn you come to, any chance inn teeming with delights . . . what could be better?"

And going home . . . he said to himself: "I have possessed three homes today, and was equally happy in all of them. Why should I drive my body from place to place, when my mind travels so lightly? And why carry out one's projects, since the project is sufficient pleasure in itself?"

—Charles Baudelaire,  
"Projects"<sup>4</sup>

Due in no small measure to Cindy Sherman's fame, self-portraiture has become a woman's issue in the arts. Quoting texts like Joan Rivière's 1929 essay on femininity and masquerade,<sup>5</sup> feminists have used self-images to describe a gender-specific phenomena. But women like Sherman, Claude Cahun, and Frida Kahlo, who use their own faces and bodies in situations that propose complex relationships to their environments, are in the forefront of a greater, more inclusive shift in consciousness, one that defines in large measure the *raison d'être* of modernism—and that goes back to the early days of capitalism, when Baudelaire and Manet, among others, were struggling to define in words and images the rapid changes taking place in societal concepts of space, time, and the individual.

A case in point: Baudelaire's flaneur, who in this prose poem, published in *Paris Spleen*, is meandering through his day. Susan Buck-Morss has noted that Paris is not often described in Baudelaire's writings; it enters into his oeuvre not as a concrete environment, a precisely delineated *mise-en-scène*, but rather as a



**Figure 1.5** John Vanderlyn, *Panorama: Palace and Gardens of Versailles*, c. 1820, oil on canvas, 12 × 165 ft., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Senate House Association, Kingston, New York, 1952

“disconnected sequence of optical displays,”<sup>6</sup> image bites setting the stage for his thoughts. In the case of this poem, he enters a park, and constructs a palace in his mind; looks at a print, and projects himself into it; he then sees an inn, and imagines what life would be like inside. Landscape, architecture, art: they are all the same to him, all equivalent as catalysts for self-projection, springboards for his musings about what his life might be. Like Sherman, Baudelaire’s ambulatory alter ego wastes no time differentiating between reality and illusion—or displacing his body, in spite of the fact that international travel was a cultural obsession during his lifetime.

For Baudelaire came of age at the moment when trains and steamboats were beginning to circle the globe; when tourism and immigration began opening up cultural vistas unknown to the West before; when the “odyssey” became not Ulysses’ trial by fire but a package deal. There were those who heard the call of the wild and hit the road, committed to physically experiencing the Taj Mahal and the Parthenon, Karnak and the snake charmers of India. But then there were those, by far the vast majority, who stayed home. And the world came to them, in the form of Universal Expositions, department stores, photographs—and the panoramas that allowed them to “journey without steam or sail.”<sup>7</sup>

The word *panorama* was first coined in London in 1792, nine years after the Montgolfier Brothers’ first flight in a hot air balloon. It originally referred very specifically to the cylindrical picture between 10 and 20 meters in diameter, 10 and 14 meters in height, and up to 140 meters in length described in Robert Barker’s 1787 patent for a 360 degree painting called *Nature at a Glance*. The painting was illuminated by daylight, and viewers arrived at a platform in the middle of the canvas by moving through a dark passageway, accessible only after paying an admission fee. Completely surrounded, spectators were immersed in the experience of nature. Caught in the gray areas between painting and technological invention, between art and commerce, the panorama (which devel-

oped many variations during the course of the nineteenth century) democratized visual imagery by making detailed pictures of places, people, or contemporary and historical events accessible to a broad paying public all over Europe and America (*fig. 1.5*). Although these pictures were still around as late as 1900, panorama frenzy was in its heyday in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> In other words: these art works were the television sets of Baudelaire's childhood, the cinematic reflections in the mirror of the young Manet.

And the primary theme reflected in this mirror was travel, defined variably and very broadly. Panoramas recreated the experience of global vastness, of floating in limitless expanses, of hurtling through space and time. Immersing themselves in these large-scale, circular views, audiences envisioned major cities like Rome and Berlin, simulated pilgrimages by air, land, or sea, and explored exotic jungles with restless natives. But traversing space was obviously not the only way to go in the nineteenth-century imagination: time travel played its part here too. Viewers could participate in Biblical pageantry, wander through Gothic ruins, or make history by fighting alongside the soldiers in famous battles. The people who paid to view these panoramic paintings, the precursors of cinema, did so for the same reason that Americans today watch *The Ten Commandments*, *Blade Runner*, or *Apocalypse Now*. They used these images as both personal and collective fantasies, as escape valves that released them from the spatial, temporal, and social limitations of their lives.

In this context, of course, the success of Universal Expositions—World's Fairs, extravaganzas of the mid-nineteenth century whose popularity coincided with the beginning of the panorama's decline—should not be a surprise. Visitors from all over the globe converged to stroll through pavilions representing every culture: the world as exhibition, often simulated in three-dimensional tableaux fleshed out with exacting detail. Simultaneously, department stores were born, which took their cues from these expositions. They too attempted to recreate every nation under one roof, but their fantasy landscape was for sale: Egyptian streets were the backdrop for cafés, and Persian rugs could be perused in ersatz bazaars. Elaborate multicultural displays, *mise-en-scènes* that provided every shopper with an arena of imaginary action, were designed to sell the goods and services that arrived by "steam and sail." Dream worlds of mass consumption,<sup>9</sup> these stores proposed that a purchase entitled the viewer access to an exotic culture, transformed a Parisian tanner into a Turkish sultan more easily than a train ticket ever could. Ready-to-wear clothing, another invention of these years that brought standardized types of garments within the reach of less-affluent economic groups, was also a vehicle of transformation, allowing any secretary to become a princess, any peasant to become a pasha. Baudelaire's propensity to project himself into every place he saw was, it seems, a cultural neurosis, not a purely personal one. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, viewers saw the world through panoramas. By the end of this epoch, the terms had reversed themselves, and the world itself had become a panorama: a theatrical spectacle in which everyone was both player and payer.

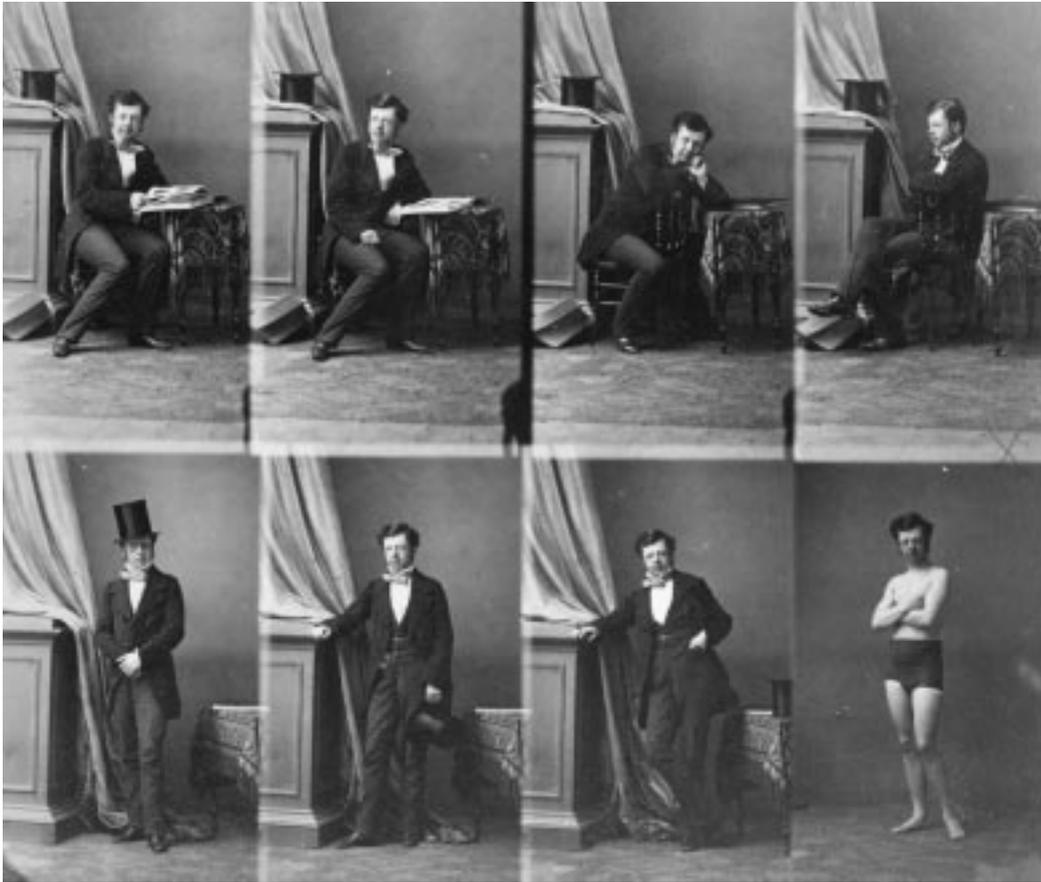


Figure 1.6 A. A. E. Disdéri, *Prince Lobkowitz*, 1858, albumen print from glass negative, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation Gift, 1995

Which brings us back, of course, to Cindy Sherman, who can trace her ancestry to those eager “travelers” of yesteryear. During the early days of the panorama craze the paintings—“moving” versions that could be rolled or scrolled—were used in live performances, as the backdrop for human actors and the stories they told. By 1820, however, the audience became more interested in the landscape than the people, more fascinated by the environment than the narrative. The panoramas stayed; the comedians became superfluous, and soon were gone. Like Ms. Sherman, the spectators preferred to project themselves into the empty pictures, to see themselves battling the Philistines, climbing the Alps, or standing on the rooftops of Paris peering into a stranger’s window. Voyeurism transformed everyone into the hero of his or her fantasy life. Panoramas became the field of dreams, the stage upon which Everyman could lose himself in order to find his image floating all over the globe.

Another, parallel “field of dreams” developed in tandem with the panorama craze. Whereas the large-scale paintings were empty backdrops, open invitations for mental self-projections of the Baudelairean kind, it was the small-

scale, inexpensive *cartes de visite* that allowed Everyman to place his body inside the picture, to enter the imaginary arena and act his part. Patented by the Parisian photographer A. A. E. Disdéri in 1854 and wildly popular throughout the 1860s (*fig. 1.6*), the *carte de visite* was the first small, inexpensive photographic portrait within the economic range of almost everyone. Six by nine centimeters, made by dividing one wet collodion glass plate into six to ten rectangles that could be exposed either simultaneously or in series, the images were pasted on the back of conventional engraved calling cards and handed out to friends and associates.

The earliest *carte de visite* photographers were faced with a Herculean task: teaching the public the art of posing. For help they turned to the theater, hang-



**Figure 1.7** Mayer & Pierson, *Countess de Castiglione*, c. 1860, albumen print, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, David Hunter McAlpin Fund, 1975



**Figure 1.8** Mayer & Pierson, *Countess de Castiglione*, n.d., albumen print, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, David Hunter McAlpin Fund, 1975

ing celebrity portraits, especially of actors on stage, throughout their studios. Clients confused about what to do before the camera were encouraged to identify with these players: to think a part, and shape a role, that conformed to the self-image they wanted to project. Before long, the fantasy aspect of these tiny photographs began to supersede their documentary exactitude. Clients insisted on renting formal clothing, on posing in elaborate furnished rooms, on aping the gestures of the rich and famous. Sherman's art history series has its roots in the routine fare of photographic studios like Camille Silvy's, based in England, which specialized in posing clients in tableaux that were the spitting images of Ingres paintings. (Probably her most famous predecessor, however, was the Countess de Castiglione, the *femme fatale* of Second Empire aristocracy, who hired the firm of Mayer & Pierson to photograph her in hundreds of outfits, including the nun's habits pictured here (*figs. 1.7, 1.8*). Studio operators like the Canadian William Notman would construct elaborate stage sets according to client specifications, *mise-en-scènes* that enabled the sitter to enact, or reenact, heroic scenes. (One man, for instance, proud of the bear he had killed, hired this photographer to recreate the snowy hunt so his friends could see how it happened!) No distinction was made between the real and the unreal; it was the quality of the illusion that counted.<sup>10</sup> Any fantasy scenario could be played out, for a price. Like Baudelaire's *flâneur*, one could possess anything one could imagine.

It must be mentioned that it was in large modern cities like Paris, teeming with restaurants, theaters, and street life, filled with tourists and immigrants, that the *carte de visite* industry could flourish—because these urban environments gave many different kinds of people the chance to stare at each other. Surrounded by diverse styles of dress and behavior, city dwellers could speculate about how the other half lives and imagine themselves in another's shoes. Baudelaire likened the lover of crowds to “an ‘I’ with an insatiable appetite for the ‘non-I’”<sup>11</sup>—and the *carte de visite* was the imaginary arena within which this self-projection could occur. Whereas panoramas unleashed places from their moorings in space and time, *cartes de visite* unleashed people from their hidebound shackles in the social hierarchy, from the drudgery of their day-to-day lives. A secretary could become the Countess d'Haussonville; a worker could enter the bourgeoisie; a young boy could change his clothing and become an African native. Since these photographs were intended for circulation in the social arena—as business cards, calling cards, gifts for friends—the images helped to shape, and gain widespread acceptance for, a complex picture of social identity: one that tacitly accepted not only a person's realities but also a person's fantasies as valid aspects of self-representation.

In other words, these portraits *were* Manet's mirror: the place where one's illusion could detach from one's actuality and float free. No longer mired in class, in gender, in race, religion, or country, the sitter's image—if not the sitter him/herself—achieved mobility within the borders of the frame. People locked tight, like Manet's waitress, within the prison of their mundane existences suddenly found themselves able to project themselves into other roles less con-

stricted than their own—to experience other existences, to see the world from a number of different points of view, without leaving the safety of the photographer’s studio. Virtual reality begins here, in this place where peoples’ lives remain stationery while their consciousness does not; where the self-image ceases to be unitary, and instead becomes a mirror reflecting the kaleidoscope of a multicultural and multitemporal environment.

<p>The universe was once conceived as the passive stage upon which the dramatic conflict of human wills was enacted and resolved. Today man has discovered that that which seemed simple and stable is, instead, complex and volatile; his own inventions have put into motion new forces, toward which he has yet to invent a new relationship. Unlike Ulysses, he can no longer travel over a universe stable in space and time to find</p>	<p>adventures; nor can he solve intimate antagonisms with an adversary sportingly suitable in stature. Rather, each individual is the center of a personal vortex; and the aggressive variety and enormity of the adventures which swirl about and confront him are unified only by his personal identity. . . . The integrity of the individual identity is counterpointed to the volatile character of a relativistic universe.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">—<i>Maya Deren</i><sup>12</sup></p>
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Maya Deren wrote this statement in the late 1940s as a program note for her film *At Land*, which she described as an “inverted odyssey.”<sup>13</sup> This film was Deren’s attempt to create, in her own words, a “mythological voyage of the twentieth century,”<sup>14</sup> a nonlinear narrative that refers simultaneously to both Homer’s *Odyssey* and Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*. But she herself is the star of this show, the archetypal heroine born of the sea whose quest—the search for a missing chess piece—takes her over hill and valley, through nature and culture, until the final resolution (*fig. 1.9*). Following in the footsteps of her nineteenth-century forebears, Deren decided to project herself into the picture, to personify the dramatic action she wished to express. Like both Sherman and Claude Cahun, Deren felt the need to place herself within the epic structures of human experience, to identify with the ancient archetypes given to us as cultural role models. Her use of herself as subject, therefore, is hardly simple self-expression: it is, rather, an attempt at self-transcendence, an endeavor to replace the isolated individual within the context of the larger collective consciousness.

Writing about *At Land*, Parker Tyler described it as “a patently personal revelation transcending itself, the story of an individual in modern life as she extroverts the inner life in terms of the outer life.”<sup>15</sup> Deren herself was adamant

Figure 1.9 Maya Deren, four film stills from *At Land*, 1944. Photo: Arunas



[ 1 ]



[ 2 ]

that her attraction to film was based on the medium's ability to visualize radical changes in both space and time, and therefore to suggest the kaleidoscopic nature of modern experience. Writing in the 1940s, before the advent of television, she explained:

Today the airplane and the radio have created, in fact, a relativistic reality of time and space. They have introduced into our immediate reality a dimension which functions not as an added spatial location but which, being both temporal and spatial, relates to all the other dimensions with which we are familiar. . . . Imperceptibly, almost, this sense of relativism has begun to influence our thinking. In spatial terms, for example, the absolutistic differentiation between *here* and *there* loses meaning as *here* and *there*, being so mutually accessible, become, in effect, almost identical. In terms of time, the chronology of the past, present and future has also increasingly lost its meaning as we have come to understand the continuity of the past with the future—and, prodded on by the actual acceleration of historical processes, to deal with the present moment as an extension of the past into the future rather than as an independent temporal period. . . . There is not an object which does not require relocation in terms of this new frame of reference, and not least among these is the individual.”<sup>16</sup>

Deren's films can in fact be seen as her attempt to “relocate” the individual within the expanded context of time and space that is modernism, to recreate “the aggressive variety and enormity of the adventures which swirl about” all of us as we pursue the odysseys that are our lives. She herself starred in three of her own films, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (made with husband Alexander Hammid), *At Land*, and *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, and in all of these works she watches herself react to a constantly changing environment. People continually turn into each other (in *At Land*, for instance, the young John Cage is suddenly transformed into Hammid; in *Ritual* . . . , Deren and Anaïs Nin are interchangeable); landscapes shift wildly, manifesting abrupt alterations in the geographical flow; actions are repeated backward; and past and future selves



[ 3 ]



[ 4 ]

share the screen, often regarding and interacting with each other to create, in Deren's words, "an altogether extraordinary order of simultaneity."<sup>17</sup> The film medium becomes Alice's Wonderland, the Looking Glass world, and Deren herself must negotiate this fantastic terrain. Whereas Ulysses traveled through a stable landscape, this artist's constantly shifting stage sets represent her "personal vortex," adventures marking the mirror of the mind. Ulysses moved; Deren, inverting his voyage, perceives, and her conflation of the inner life and the outer landscape both alters and holds together a universe in continual flux.

Although Deren, like Cahun, was friends with surrealists such as André Breton (and the chess reference in *At Land* to Marcel Duchamp, who starred in one of her films, should not go unremarked), she denied any connection with the movement or its aesthetic aims. Talking about *Meshees of the Afternoon*, she stated that she was interested in the credibility of the unreal, not the incredibility of the unreal. "I am concerned," she wrote, "with that point of contact between the unreal and the real, where the unreal manifests itself in reality."<sup>18</sup> Her films were intended as imaginary arenas where this point of contact could be visualized—where boundaries normally fixed could dissolve, or become wildly flexible; where protagonists could move freely between dreams and waking life without ever resolving the differences between the two; where nature and culture, urban and rural environments could be separated (and linked) by a single step; where past and future selves could meet along the road, fracturing into clones moving along parallel paths of time and space. Even her years working in Haiti during the late 1940s and early 1950s, (*fig. 1.10*)—which resulted in not only seven hours of film footage but also hundreds of photographic negatives (printed and shown here, in many cases, for the first time), a brilliant book,<sup>19</sup> and her initiation into the religious practices of Vodou—were endeavors to experience another cultural environment where ideas of space and time, life and death, the sacred and the profane, gave "credibility to the unreal" by allowing the living and the dead to cohabit in the space of the temple or in the body of a worshipper possessed by a spirit.



**Figure 1.10** Maya Deren, *Untitled (Maya Deren in Haiti)*, n.d. (late 1940s to early 1950s), black-and-white modern photograph printed from the original negative

Deren's photographs and films of Haitians transformed, by virtue of possession, into their ancestral *lwa* (deities) are part of a cosmological vision with deeply spiritual implications, where ritual practices unite body and soul, mortal and immortal in a single dance. Deren's most significant contribution to postmodern discourse may, in fact, be her profound understanding of the ties that link the contemporary and the "primitive" (sic), the Western and the Other: Deren lived out, in the rituals of Vodou, exactly the relativistic universe she proposed in her avant-garde films. Haitian worshippers, becoming possessed in the course of a religious dance (plates 39, 40), take on the attributes (the voice, the gestures, the costumes) that are characteristic of the *lwa* in question; their ritual transformation differentiates their mundane social identity

## INVERTED ODYSSEYS

from the identity of the sacred spirit that has temporarily inhabited their body. In becoming the ancestral deities, they—like Deren in *At Land*—transcend themselves, allow themselves to join forces with their history, with the supernatural archetypes of the race.

In the course of a Vodou ritual, therefore, the donning of mask and costume signals the breakthrough of the “unreal” into the “real,” the emergence of the fantastic into the social body itself. Such a concept of “masquerade” far exceeds the limited psychological or feminist frameworks common in twentieth century Western thought. Rather than a “false” identity hiding a “real” one, these shifts in costume and persona propose in fact that the Self is not unitary; that it is as flexible, and as changeable, as Deren suggests; that it holds within

**Figure 1.11** Maya Deren, *Untitled (Male Worshipper Possessed by Gede)*, n.d. (late 1940s to early 1950s), black-and-white modern photograph printed from the original negative





**Figure 1.12** Maya Deren, *Untitled (Female Worshipper Possessed by Gede)*, n.d. (late 1940s to early 1950s), black-and-white modern photograph printed from the original negative

itself the capability of manifesting multiple facets of the collective history of the race. Hardly a nihilistic splintering of identity, such a vision is a massive expansion of our concept of the human experience, a restructuring of the individual along lines that indeed propose Manet's mirror as an accurate reflection of our essential diversity. "Under this mask, another mask," wrote Claude Cahun. "I will never finish lifting up all these faces."<sup>20</sup>

Among Maya Deren's Haitian photographs there are two, reproduced here, that document worshippers possessed by the *lwa* Gede, spirit of the dead (*figs. 1.11, 1.12*). One of the worshippers is male, the other female. But this gender difference becomes irrelevant when the individual is "mounted" by the deity, when

the body is overtaken by energies stronger than those that mark us in the social world. The similarity of gesture, of body language, of the cigarette (Gede's attribute) in the two photographs, the obliteration in fact of sexual difference by the deity, would have pleased Claude Cahun, whose thinking was greatly influenced by the writings (which she in fact translated) of Havelock Ellis: the English theorist who proposed the possibility of a third sex, neither masculine nor feminine but uniting the capabilities of both.

Begun when she was only a teenager, Cahun's photographic self-portraits manifest a restless need for metamorphosis already evident in the pseudonyms she would adopt. Born Lucy Schwob in 1894 into a wealthy and renowned literary family in Nantes, she was active as a writer and a political theorist in Paris during the 1920s and 1930s, publishing works such as *Aveux non avendus* (a book of meditations, aphorisms, and personal philosophical ideas) and *Les Paris sont ouverts* (a political tract that greatly influenced André Breton). A Jewish, lesbian, surrealist revolutionary, she spent her life as a marginal figure, always fitting uneasily into the numerous circles she frequented—and her creative work was her form of rebellion against any *idée fixe* about Woman in general and herself in particular. Boasting about her dilettantism, her eccentricity, and her unapologetic ambiguity, she used her art work to disrupt ideas of gender, social identity, and femininity that were too restrictive, to slip between the social categories that threatened to limit her. For this woman, even the mirror of the mind seemed like a trap:

A sheet of glass. Where shall I put the reflective silver? On this side or the other: in front of or behind the pane?

Before I imprison myself, I blind myself. What does it matter to me, Passer-by, to offer myself a mirror in which you recognize yourself, even if it is a deforming mirror and signed by my own hand? . . . Behind, I am equally enclosed. I will not know anything of outside. At least I will recognize my own face—and maybe it will suffice enough to please me.<sup>21</sup>

Her photographs of the 1920s place enormous psychological weight on her body, her face, her clothing, and her gestures, as signposts pointing toward not only multiple images but multiple selves. As Katy Kline has stated, “there is no single original Claude to be found”<sup>22</sup> in these pictures, and her remarkable self-transformations can render her virtually unrecognizable from one photograph to the next. It should be mentioned that Cahun was active in the Parisian theater during these years, and was an associate of both the Théâtre Esotérique and Le Plateau: organizations markedly experimental and symbolist in orientation that included Japanese, Indian, and Sufi theater in their programs.<sup>23</sup> More research needs to be done on Cahun's dramatic involvements, and it is still unclear exactly how many of her self-portraits were originally theatrical stills. In any case, it is obvious that she herself was aware of the continuity between these two aspects of her artistic life. Like the *carte de visite* photographers, Cahun saw her small black-and-white photos as fields of dreams, as two-dimensional *mise-en-scènes* that allowed her to transform herself into a Buddha, a vampire, an angel, a man, a witch, or a sailor—roles denied to her in the social world. “The

happiest moments of my life?” she wrote. “Dreaming. Imagining I’m someone else. Playing my favorite part.”<sup>24</sup>

But in the case of Cahun’s photographs, these were private dreams, and that is an important, and under-recognized, aspect of her production. Her famous photomontages, in which she continually multiplied, fragmented, and disrupted her own image to provide commentaries on identity and femininity (plates 13, 14), were published in 1930 in her book, *Aveux non avenues*. Besides one picture printed in the magazine *Bifur* in 1930, these were in fact the only self-portraits published by the artist during her lifetime. The mirror image was, in fact, to be kept out of circulation; small, intimate snapshots, these photo-



Figure 1.13 Claude Cahun, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1938, black-and-white photograph, Jersey Museums Service

graphs were personal researches, not statements of social intent. Refusing to be imprisoned within her own glass, Cahun decided to live the imaginary life within the jealously guarded walls of her own introverted mental theater.

Also unpublished was her manuscript “Heroines,” which was excerpted in *Le Mercure de France* (no. 639) and *Le Journal Littéraire* (no. 45) in 1925 but which is here printed for the first time in its entirety. A series of fictional monologues spoken by famous women of myth and literature (Eve, Delilah, Salomé, the Virgin Mary, Sappho, Penelope among them), these dark, often perverse texts explore the mindscapes of women trapped against their will within the web of history<sup>25</sup>—a fate which Cahun, in spite of her best efforts, was unable to avoid. Moving to the Isle of Jersey in 1937, she created her later work in the shadow of Hitler, whose soldiers occupied the small British isle during World War II.

There’s an image from these years, taken in 1938: Cahun seated behind bars, looking out of what seems to be a prison window (*fig. 1.13*). The mirror has here been superseded by a more timely metaphor, one better suited to the political arena. The artist was, in fact, imprisoned by German troops toward the end of the war; condemned to death for terrorist activities against Nazi soldiers, she and her stepsister/lover Suzanne Malherbe both managed to survive the war. But this photograph is a premonition, taken years before her arrest. Seated upon her own windowsill, staring out of the glass panes of her living room, Cahun is trapped—not, this time, by gender definitions but by historical circumstances.

Under siege on this tiny island because of her religious background, Cahun photographed herself continually during these years within the confines of her property. These pictures are different from the earlier ones; focusing less on the body and more on landscape and the environment, the later works are transformations not of the self but of space. Mostly taken outdoors, her pictures of the sea, of cemeteries, of tropical trees or roads and beaches give the impression of vast stretches of land and radical changes of scene. Unable to move, Cahun created a global stage in her backyard; her domestic environment is transformed in these tiny black-and-white snapshots into a world theater. Just as the early works were fields of dreams that moved Cahun out of the prison of social definitions, these later ones provided her with a way out of her entrapment in religious hatred and war. Like her nineteenth-century predecessors, this artist used photography to “journey without steam or sail,” to project herself beyond the limitations of her life circumstances. Escape valves from start to finish, Cahun’s photographic works provided her with a parallel universe, a mental theater where she could live the imaginary life with a freedom that was denied her in the historical world.

More than the other two artists discussed here, Claude Cahun created a private vocabulary, a personal mythology that was always tangential to her life in the social world. Her reflection in Manet’s mirror (like the barmaid’s) was incongruous, dissociated; but it was still based on biography, on the feelings, attitudes, and events of her life as it evolved. Depicting only the most intimate spaces—her body, her domestic environment, her backyard—these small snap-

shots nevertheless described a psychological passage through history. Like Vermeer's *Young Woman with a Water Jug*, Claude Cahun found that her inner chambers were inextricably bound to the world outside.

Cahun is often compared to Cindy Sherman, often seen as her precursor in the continually reedited film of art's history.<sup>26</sup> Yes, *but*: anyone who has seen one of Cahun's tiny, black-and-white prints next to gargantuan, garish color photographs by Sherman knows that there's more to this comparison than meets the eye. Both of these women use their own bodies as subjects in extremely theatrical, photographic tableaux. Like Maya Deren, they have chosen to personify, in their pictures, their own perceptions about the world—and not simply their perceptions about themselves. Too much emphasis has been placed, in discussions of twentieth-century women's self-portraiture, on feminist or psychological interpretations; such contexts tend to be self-reflexive and limiting, tend to ghettoize the pictures within the female experience. Works like Maya Deren's are hardly trapped within the cul-de-sac of feminine masquerade, or obsessed with the limitations of the male gaze. These works, like Vermeer's and Manet's, are attempts to describe the relationship between our microcosmic lives and our macrocosmic world—between our personal odysseys and the cultural, spiritual, or natural landscapes within which they are enacted. Now that women have the privilege of being both artists and subjects, they are using that privilege to place themselves within the big picture, to reshape a global vision that better suits their needs. Hardly self-centered or narcissistic, their art is in fact an attempt to redress the fragmented, fractured individualism of today's world by relocating the individual within the panoramic sweep of the human condition.

The three women in *Inverted Odysseys* propose different solutions to this problem. Deren (born 1917 in Russia) and Cahun (born 1894 in France) worked within the modernist tradition; both of them were involved in tangential ways with the surrealists, and both of them saw their art as deeply, inextricably engaged with their subjective selves. Cindy Sherman, on the other hand, was born in 1954; growing up in suburban New York, she watched TV. Her interior spaces are therefore crammed with electronic images, film stills, pin-ups, fairy tales and rear screen projections, and her subjectivity has less to do with nature than with culture, with experiences already mediated, codified, predigested into images. The iconic phantoms that are her preferred subjects move her away from her predecessors' modernism and into the realm of the postmodern. Cahun's work was designed to subvert any social or sexual *idées fixe*, to destroy those mental images that force the living into a kind of experiential death. Cindy Sherman's work is about this death—her inverted odyssey takes us on a trip through the morgues of history, where horror, violence, murder, and sexuality abound.

Cindy Sherman rummages through our cultural image bank the way shoppers rummage through the racks in a flea market. This comparison is particularly apt, since her subjects are always "used," never invented; her recycled works depend on the shock of recognition, never on direct experience. When Baudelaire meandered through his day, it was the people, the places, the art

works he encountered that inspired his imagination, that provided him with arenas for self-projection. Sherman, on the other hand, is uninterested in the messy disorder of places or people clamoring for attention in the physical world; her encounters take place within the realm of the virtual, where everything has already been frozen into images—fetish objects that are complete, self-contained, still as death.

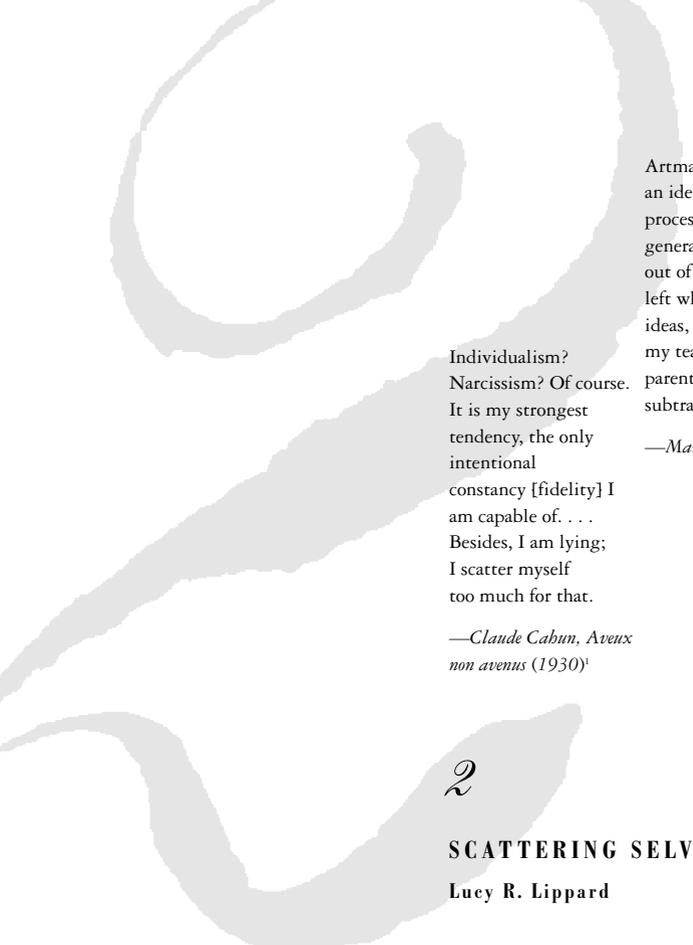
Her photographic and film work, as it has evolved over the past twenty years, is a veritable walking tour through the idealized and horrific mythologies that shape our popular culture. But American culture is a multicultural and multitemporal mirror, a trash heap of history and geography, where icons of high and low culture, the old and the new, the first and the third worlds coexist. Emptied of content, disembodied from their roots in culture, these images become equivalent arenas for self-projection, stage sets for spectacular voyages through time and space. Sherman's brilliance is her ability, not to use a mirror, but to become one: to allow her body to reflect, in a detached and often humorous manner, the smorgasbord of images that constitute our vision of the world. Moving with equal ease through history and a fashion magazine, she transforms herself into a movie star, a witch, an Italian gentleman, or an aristocratic matron from art history. Carefully manipulating lights, costumes, and props, she creates *mise-en-scènes* (with more than a hint of artifice) that place her within the lifestyles and environments of both her ancestors and her contemporaries. Vermeer's young woman stayed at home, and the world raged around her. Sherman's, however, is an inverted odyssey; becoming a TV set, she allows the world's images to flow through her. She identifies not with any one specific image but with the "personal vortex" that is her experience of contemporary life. Like Deren, she is embodying within herself "the volatile character of a relativistic universe."

Thus her decision to dress up like a '50s ingenue rather than a Renaissance madonna, a battered woman, Rembrandt, or a gremlin (see plates 41–56) is, ultimately, not as important as her understanding that these characters are, one and all, the archetypes in the mirrors of our minds, the allegories that are the mass hallucinations of our media society. Unlike Vodou worshippers in Haiti, we in contemporary America acknowledge no deities; we deny a pantheon of supernatural beings who determine our destinies, who have the power to "possess" our bodies or intervene in our lives. In our denial, we give more power to the archetypes that we indeed have created: those images of beauty, of sexuality, of wealth and power that are emblazoned in neon across our skies, projected into our movie palaces, beamed into our homes and offices—that possess us, in short, not simply in the course of a religious ceremony but throughout every waking minute of our lives. Donning masks and costumes, embodying the spirits of our culture, Sherman takes on the almost shamanic function of reanimating the icons that hold us all in their thrall.

It is often said that we will become what we behold. Claude Cahun, for her part, was desperately worried about getting trapped in the distortions of the mirror's reflective surfaces. Not so Cindy Sherman. By aping our cultural myths, she has, ironically, become one herself.

NOTES

1. José Ortega y Gasset, "On Point of View in the Arts," in *Aesthetics Today*, ed. Morris Philipson (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1961), 129.
2. Lawrence Weschler, "Inventing Peace," *The New Yorker*, November 20, 1995, 56–64.
3. *Ibid.*, 59.
4. Charles Baudelaire, "Projects," in *Paris Spleen*, trans. Louise Varèse (New York: New Directions, 1970), 48–49.
5. Joan Rivière, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," in *Formation of Fantasy*, eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), 35–44. Originally published in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 10, 1929.
6. Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 186.
7. Charles Baudelaire, "Travelers" in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, trans. Richard Howard (Boston: David R. Godine, 1983), 153.
8. For more information about panoramas, see Ralph Hyde, *Panoromania*, ex. cat. Barbican Art Gallery, London, 1988; *Sehsucht*, ex. cat. Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, 1993; and Stephen Oettermann, *The Panorama* (Cambridge: Zone Books/MIT Press, 1997).
9. As described in Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 58.
10. For a wonderful discussion of concepts of truth in the nineteenth century, see Miles Orvell, "Almost Nature," in *Multiple Views*, ed. Daniel Younger (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), 139–167.
11. Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," from *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1970), 9.
12. Reprinted in Catrina Neiman, *The Legend of Maya Deren*, ed. Millicent Hodson, vol. 1, pt. 2 (New York: Anthology Film Archives/Film Culture, 1988), 193.
13. *Ibid.*, 365.
14. *Ibid.*, 194.
15. *Ibid.*, 195.
16. *Ibid.*, 319.
17. *Ibid.*, 196.
18. *Ibid.*, 361.
19. *Divine Horsemen* (Kingston, New York: Documentext, 1970); originally published in 1953 with a foreword by Joseph Campbell.
20. Claude Cahun, from *Aveux non avenues* (Paris: Editions du Carrefour, 1930); quoted in Honor Lasalle and Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Surrealist Confession," *Afterimage*, March 1992, 10. My translation.
21. *Ibid.*, 12.
22. Katy Kline, "Claude Cahun and Cindy Sherman," in *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Reproduction*, ed. Whitney Chadwick (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 76.
23. For more information on Cahun's theatrical career, see François Leperlier, *Claude Cahun: L'écart et la métamorphose* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1992), 89ff.
24. Quoted in François Leperlier, "Claude Cahun," in *Mise en scène* (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1994), 20.
25. Leperlier, *Claude Cahun*, 49. He speculates that the manuscript's title may be in reference to Jules Laforgue's *Les Moralités Légendaires*, to which Cahun's text is dedicated. In this work, published in *Le Mercure de France* in 1897, Laforgue referred to "Ruth, the unfortunate and typical heroine. . . ."
26. This is a question of precedence, not influence. Sherman was not aware of Cahun's work until the early 1990s, long after she had begun her own.



Artmaking is  
an identity-making  
process. . . . I could  
generate a new self  
out of the absence that was  
left when my boyfriends'  
ideas,  
my teachers' and my  
parents' ideas were  
subtracted.

—Martha Wilson (c. 1974)<sup>2</sup>

Individualism?  
Narcissism? Of course.  
It is my strongest  
tendency, the only  
intentional  
constancy [fidelity] I  
am capable of. . . .  
Besides, I am lying;  
I scatter myself  
too much for that.

—Claude Cabun, *Aveux  
non avens* (1930)<sup>1</sup>

## 2

### SCATTERING SELVES

Lucy R. Lippard

The most basic questions about being human involve and sometimes confuse *body*, *soul*, *self*, and *identity*—a progression from protection to projection that is not necessarily an evolution. When the second wave of feminism filtered into the art world around 1970, these factors inevitably became significant for women artists who were radically reenvisioning their own humanity and recreating their senses of self without outside help, thank you. For almost thirty years now, the *body*—usually the artist's own—has been an obsession, often standing in for the *self*. At death the body becomes a corpse or cadaver, implying for some the existence of a *soul*. Along the way, self and society have collaborated in constructing an *identity*.

However theorized and/or objectively perused, the body remains inherently vulnerable as the most private and intimate “thing” we “have.” It is also the most public. The body, face included, is that part of us that is physically projected into the world. It precedes the self. It precedes us, as women, into every social and political situation. It is what everyone else sees and thinks they know. Yet the original meaning of the Anglo-Saxon and medieval German source words for body was only “cask” or “tub for brewing,” from which emerged the concept of the body or flesh as mere shell for the soul. (Women's bodies were considered more “mere,” more disgusting, than men's.) The original notion of transformation was of course a religious one. The soul, not the shell, was ripe for transformation. Somewhere along the line, beginning in the Renaissance and accelerating during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the individual self came loose, so to speak, from the soul and lodged in the body. Which is

where the feminist art movement found it, ripe for a new kind of transformation—a woman-created woman.

While one's body changes on its own terms and is relatively difficult to control (Orlan's works with plastic surgery notwithstanding), the self is constituted of change, defined by change, subject to change, open to change, a vehicle for transformation. It says something about modern life that selves can apparently be changed by projecting different *looks*. The relationship between self and body varies within any single life. Body first determines self. Then self determines the body's posture and adornments, and to some extent its physical characteristics. In the late 1960s, borrowing a term but not necessarily its meaning from psychologist Gilbert Rose, I talked about "body ego" as an extension of self into abstract, quasi-erotic sculptures like Eva Hesse's or Harmony Hammond's. It would also have applied to any number of feminist artworks, to Claes Oldenburg's soft sculptures and Lucas Samaras's later "photo-transformations," to all those works in which the body and the self seem subsumed. Identity, on the other hand, is more often imposed or arrived at collectively, compressed between internal and external needs and demands. Aside from a "proper" name, identity (class, race, gender, vocation, sexual, geographic, and religious preference) is both predetermined and an ideological choice. Projected identities are a group phenomenon. Self-transformation is an artist's turf, and many who have mastered self-transformation go unrecognized as artists.

Collage has been the major transformational tool of twentieth-century art, offering a way of rearranging the parts to create a new hybrid whole. The Dada-Surrealist wedding of unlikes continues to be a fertile esthetic device. Conventional photography might seem to have little to do with this trajectory, but photography and collage/montage have interwoven fates. Precisely because it was once supposed to be the vehicle of truth and realism, photography's role in subverting both has been particularly potent. Collage is an esthetic, even a state of mind, as much as it is a technique. Cutting and pasting is not an exclusive prerequisite. Maya Deren and Claude Cahun (*fig. 2.1*) used montage ideas to create the new realities that Surrealists were exploring at the time, but both perceived the female body as the prime (not biological) vehicle and went off in different directions from their male colleagues (as did Hannah Hoch in her "New Woman" series). Cahun, as an outsider to the dominant society (a Jew, a lesbian) most radically revised her self by temporary alterations of her body, opening up options unavailable in daily life while leaving her identity untouched. Deren, as an immigrant, an artist, and a woman in the then-male world of film, was also endowed with that oblique glance of the outsider looking in, a glance that cuts and enters at odd angles, particularly suited to photographic and cinematic media. Cindy Sherman, on the other hand, came more "naturally" to the notion of constant recreation of herself as heir to the first generation of feminist artists dealing with transformation and the body in the early to mid 1970s. Her impetus was a burgeoning postmodern art, molded from the conceptual arts of the waning decade rather than political circumstances.



**Figure 2.1** Claude Cahun, Untitled, c. 1936, collage on postcard, 5% × 3% in., Courtesy of Zabriskie Gallery

Thanks to the fertile and iconoclastic decade that preceded them, artists in the 1970s had an expanded vocabulary to work from—combinations of photography, video, film, performance, painting, and sculpture. Photography played a large part in early feminist transformation art precisely because it was only on the verge of arthood at the time, retaining an aura of casual factuality that would soon be demolished. As documentation became art objects, photography and text were the staples of artists who revised or rejected the “fine art” media historically associated with the manipulation of women’s images over the centuries.

It was these years of fusion that Sherman drew upon when she got out of art school and encountered her real education at Hallwalls, a Buffalo alternative space. She has said painting never inspired her to any original ideas, but photography did, along with exposure to performance and conceptual art. Gilbert and George and Eleanor Antin were early interests, as was fashion/Hollywood photography. The origins of the poignant but klutzy gestures in Sherman’s film stills series could be the TV reruns she enjoyed for the nostalgia. As a kid she spent a great deal of time in front of the television looking outward, and in front of a mirror, experimenting with makeup, looking inward, in preparation for going “out.” Through the film stills she put herself in the movies, fulfilling the great American ambition of becoming a movie star, and by her own volition. Without suffering the casting couch, she actively cast herself in many roles, in many molds to reveal the stereotypes that had enchanted her and so many other American girls, only to break out of them all over again.

Sherman initiated her “film stills” series in 1977, the year she moved to New York City and began to explore female *experience*—more important to her work than the female *appearances* for which she is better known. She says she was “thinking of general stereotypes . . . what I remembered women to be like when I was growing up. I was really looking for the most artificial looking kinds of women. Women that had cinched-in waists and pointed bras, lots of make-up, stiff hair, high heels. . . .”<sup>3</sup> This search for the artificial rather than the “real” epitomized the postmodern esthetic.

Few of Sherman’s images actually resemble film stills as much as they do static, nonnarrative model shots. Diane Arbus’s *Girl in a coat lying on her bed, N.Y.C. 1968* could in turn have been a model for Sherman’s film stills in the use of space around the figure, the vulnerable expression on the subject’s face, reflected in her pose, and the framed images on the wall. Julia Ballerini once paired the two, contending that unlike Sherman’s work, Arbus’s images are “strictly honest and documentary,” that “there is no sense of an artificial set up, no sense of an interrupted narrative.”<sup>4</sup> My own take on this is Arbus’s subject presents herself to the camera much as Sherman does, but she is less adept at hiding who she is. She is not an artist but patently an artist’s subject. There *is* a narrative here, an actual life, interrupted by the artifice of public presentation imposed by the camera. The melancholy is both real and concocted, which is what makes the image so fascinating, whereas part of the pleasure of viewing Sherman’s work lies in knowing what’s going on, balancing with her in that gap

between fictions. If one discovered that Arbus had hired the model and posed her just so, it would have a different effect—the Sherman effect. As Ballerini wrote, it is Arbus’s “*subjects* who attempt artifice, not she. And victims of the seriousness of style, they fail.”<sup>5</sup>

In 1975, I wrote: “When women use their own bodies in their art work, they are using their *selves*; a significant psychological factor converts those bodies or faces from object to subject. However, there are ways and ways of using one’s own body, and women have not always avoided self-exploitation. A woman artist’s approach to herself is necessarily complicated by social stereotypes. . . . A woman using her own face and body has a right to do what she will with them, but it is a subtle abyss that separates men’s use of women for sexual titillation from women’s use of women to expose that insult.” For instance, placing herself on both sides of the camera did not entirely protect Sherman, a few years later, from the dangers of overidentifying with the male gaze. Display can be used as “a form of intimidation, a defense . . . a shield.”<sup>6</sup>

More than twenty years later, a lot of transforming having happened in the interim, the ante has been upped to theoretical heights unsuspected in the 1970s. This is the first time I have lived *through* a brief history and come out the other side. It’s a fascinating and occasionally depressing experience to watch the story of 1970s feminist art kaleidoscopically recalled/reinvented by its inventors, and manipulated and changed by those who were not there, often for personal motives that have nothing to do with what really went down. Not that there was any one truth in those chaotic years. It’s easier to insist “that’s not the way it happened” than it is to say exactly what did happen.

Suffice it to say that feminist art in the early 1970s was hugely self-conscious (self-consciousness being the burden of modernism and of feminist activism), deliberately varied and inconclusive, celebrating the victory of process over product. As Mary Kelly has put it, feminism extended “the interrogation of the object to include the subjective conditions of its existence, turning political intent into personal accountability and translating institutional critique into the question of authority.”<sup>7</sup> Much feminist art was intended—naively but courageously—for the common (female) good. Feminism was the whole, and individuals were the parts that would make it strong: If you didn’t know your *self*, how could you know and then change society? The issue was identity and self combined. Social change starts at home. For women artists, home often didn’t mean who did the dishes or made the bed or even what went on in that bed. It meant finding an art form that could be a vehicle of independence. Self-determination—a political byword—was also crucial to esthetic survival. In the late 1960s and through most of the 1970s, women were quite literally trying on new roles, cautiously stepping out and daringly burning their bridges.<sup>8</sup>

The self was projected through *images* of self. Early on, performance artist Carolee Schneemann (*fig. 2.2*) made the significant distinction between being an image and an image-maker. She hoped to summon “the haunting images of the Cretan bull dancer—joyful, free, bare-breasted, skilled women leaping pre-



**Figure 2.2** Carolee Schneemann, from *Eye Body*, December 1963, black-and-white photograph of a performance



**Figure 2.3** Martha Wilson, *Posturing: Drag*, 1972, color photograph of a performance. Photo: Doug Waterman



**Figure 2.4** Adrian Piper, *The Mythic Being: Getting Back, #1*, 1975, black-and-white photograph of a street performance in Cambridge, Massachusetts

cisely from danger to ascendancy.” The mythic nature of self-liberation, “giving our bodies back to ourselves,”<sup>9</sup> as Schneemann put it, is akin to Maya Deren’s mythic ecstasies, learned in part from her Haitian subjects. Both were attempts, in Lea Vergine’s words (she was writing on Joan Jonas) at “discoveries beyond acculturation,”<sup>10</sup> or beyond identity.

While other artists were challenging the frame and the pedestal, these women were challenging the boundaries between body, self, and identity. Martha Wilson made a “drag piece” in which she changed herself into a man, then a man masquerading as a woman (*fig. 2.3*). (In the 1990s the complexity of sexual identity itself has multiplied to the “LGBT community.”<sup>11</sup>) Wilson and Jacki Apple created a composite persona named Claudia, whom they described as “powerful, gorgeous, mobile—. . . the result of the merging of the realized and the idealized self.”<sup>12</sup> Adrian Piper deliberately operated from “awareness of the boundaries of my personality”<sup>13</sup> by becoming an Afro-wigged and mustached male. Eleanor Antin was “moving out to, into, up to and down to the frontiers of myself” by becoming a king, a ballerina, a nurse.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1970s, the boundaries between self and projection were breached on women’s terms. In its trajectory from private to public, transformation art be-

comes a means of conceiving, challenging, and realizing change. For the women artists seeking new personae in their makeup kits and closets, peering into their mirrors to examine the effects, transformation art became a public as well as a private medium. Yet the performance element was only instrumental in this work which is part art, part therapy, part politics. By the late 1970s, feminist psychoanalytic theory had found its way into postmodern theory. As the action or activities were documented, the final products might resemble photographic portraiture, guerrilla theater, or private journals. Cherished fantasies and untold secrets were embodied in women's art as personal catharsis and political catalysts. Antin said that "autobiography in its fundamental sense is the self getting a grip on itself. . . . [It] can be considered a particular type of transformation in which the subject chooses a specific, as yet unarticulated image and proceeds to progressively define [herself]. . . . The usual aids to self-definition—sex, age, talent, time, and space—are merely tyrannical limitations upon my freedom of choice."<sup>15</sup>

Some of the key transformation works of the early to mid-1970s (in no particular order) were: Piper's *Catalysis* pieces (she was calmly riding the subway in stinking clothes or with a towel hanging out of her mouth, standing in a bank line dancing to Aretha Franklin in her head, appearing androgynously in the streets in Afro and mustache [*fig. 2.4*]); Antin's King, Black Ballerina and Nurse personae; Wilson's drag piece and her photo self-portraits of herself made up to project *Perfection* and *Deformation*; Lynn Hirshman's adoption of an alter ego; Judy Chicago's and Lynda Benglis's advertisements for themselves in the guise of, respectively, a prize-fighter and a dildo-wielding nude (and Robert Morris's visual replies to the latter). Like fictional characters, the new personae take off and lead their own lives.

Women stared into the camera as they did into mirrors. (Sherman preps and poses in a mirror set next to the camera; the mirror is the canvas and the camera only the brush.) For many of these women the body was revelatory as well as revealing, in an intellectual and psychological as well as a sexual sense. The choice of themselves as subjects reflected not only the isolation of women artists, the internalization of the female gaze, but intimations of unique discoveries to be made as well. (Claude Cahun was totally unknown to all of us at the time.) From these photographic scrutinies (such as Nancy Kitchel's examination of her facial expressions reflecting her emotions about memories of her mother and grandmother) emerged a more public art of disguises, of other personae, which in time became a classic feminist form. Conceptual photo-text works had merged with performance early in the decade, and women in particular liked to perform anonymously in public, emboldened by the mask or costume or simply a projected persona. Self and identity were somewhat synonymous in those days before multicultural or hybrid identities took hold in the literature, although Suzanne Lacy predicted this development in her public appearances as an old woman and as a homeless "bag lady" toward the end of the decade.

In the 1980s (outside of performance art, which began to reconcile with its theatrical matrix) the personae retreated to gallery walls. Since then, much



**Figure 2.5** Carrie Mae Weems, *Mirror, Mirror*, 1987, black-and-white photograph, courtesy of P.P.O.W. Gallery

women's work has conflated body and self, distancing the new entity from personal experience and focusing on representation rather than individual presentation in the world. The cruder, more exuberant, less theoretically complex '70s self gave way to a more objective form through which to deconstruct objectification. In the '80s we were also immersed in the politics of identity, although this word had (at least) two meanings: one derived from feminist theory and the other derived from nationalist, often third-world politics. Cross-dressing, costume, and disguise were seen politically not as ways of hiding the self but of extending the self, and at the same time redefining the identity by destruction of stereotypes, as in the earlier feminist art.

Since the 1970s these ideas have been diversified by artists such as Shelley Niro, delivering Native American women from their solemn stereotypes through play, parody, and dress-up; Yong Soon Min in her word and image plays



**Figure 2.6** Cindy Sherman, Untitled film still (#13), 1978, black-and-white photograph

on the Asian “Model Minority”; Catherine Opie in her gender-bending Daddy Boy portraits; and Carrie Mae Weems in her early grid of self-portraits in various “black women” stereotypes from cleaning lady to revolutionary. Weems also cracked the dominant culture’s mirror image with outrage in her classic photograph of a black woman confronted by a witchlike creature in her mirror, captioned: “Looking into the mirror, the Black woman asked, ‘Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the finest of them all?’ The mirror says, ‘Snow White, you Black Bitch, and don’t you forget it!!!’” (*fig. 2.5*).

Many artists in the 1980s literally followed the lead of Mary Kelly’s work from the 1970s, investigating the ramifications for feminists of Jacques Lacan’s “mirror stage” and the visual roots of identity. The zeitgeist provides the context for the work. If Claude Cahun had been rediscovered in the 1970s instead of the 1990s, we would perceive her work differently. As Whitney Chadwick remarks, “the neatness with which Cahun’s photographs have been annexed to postmodern concerns with the decentered subject and with identity as contingent and mutable has obscured the complexities and contradictions of her writings and blinded many to the works’ representations of conflicted identities.”<sup>16</sup> Yet Cahun herself warned of their resistance to capture: “Under this mask, another mask,” she wrote. “I will never be finished removing all these faces.”<sup>17</sup> Although she concentrated on the face, it is almost invisible in one of her most

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Figure 2.7 Claude Cahun, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1928, black-and-white photograph, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes



powerful images, where she is curled upon the shelf of a dresser like a small girl hiding from punishment or prying eyes while simultaneously hoping to be discovered (plate 6).

The mirror figured prominently in Sherman's early work, eventually becoming redundant by joining the camera in full agency. "With the mirror next to the camera, or while I'm making up or whatever, that's when I'm most into the character. When it really works well, it's really exciting. I really can't believe that the reflection is mine in the mirror. . . . There is a flash when you see somebody else. That's what's really interesting. . . . As soon as I stop looking in the mirror that's when I feel like myself again."<sup>18</sup> Is this why we're so fascinated by Sherman's work? Because we all do that when we look in the mirror?

In one of the first film stills (#2, 1977) the artist is wrapped in a towel, her sidelong glance visible only in the mirror. In #13 (1978) the mirror's role is reversed, showing the artist's back while the camera holds the front (*fig. 2.6*). (This one also plays with frames; there are four—the mirror, an illegible framed picture on the wall, a framed photo standing on the dresser, and the photograph we look at. It is all angles. Sometimes windows and doors provide that dreamy context. They might as well be mirrors too.) Film still #56 (1980), where the back of Sherman's head forms a lunar shadow on the reflected face, predicts the closeups soon to come.

Katy Kline compares Cahun's startled 1928 self-portrait reflected in a mirror (*fig. 2.7*) with Sherman's towel-wrapped image preening before a mirror, noting that the "real," out-of-mirror Cahun "registers the presence of the viewer and does not flinch from eye contact"<sup>19</sup> while the Sherman is totally self-engrossed. But the Cahun also seems to have been interrupted in some kind of communion with the self in the mirror, who looks away from the viewer, a theme carried through more disturbingly and poetically in *Que veux tu?* (also 1928) in which the artist's two shaved heads seem merged at the shoulders like Siamese twins; one looks out and the other "in" at her other self. These are two different images of self-love: Cahun's more assured in its idiosyncrasy, Sherman's more concerned with its art meaning. Kline contends that Cahun (as a self) is present in her work whereas Sherman is entirely absent. She quotes Laura Mulvey on Sherman: "The sense of surface now resides not in the female figure's attempt to save her face in a masquerade of femininity, but in the model's subordination to, and imbrication with, the texture of the photographic medium itself."<sup>20</sup>

Sherman has said that she never wanted to be a photographer per se, and is interested primarily in the adulterated images of her various selves that the medium can produce. She uses photography purely as a means to an end, ignoring its "innate" (Greenbergian) capacities and endowing it with the dubious distinction of being just another art form. At the same time she contradicted one kind of photography with another—films reduced to stills; the phrase itself warns of dilution. By 1980 she had moved the camera closer to her subject and to the present as she explored color. The "sets" were now landscapes provided by rear screen projections rather than on site. (Black-and-white sets emphasized the distance from the figure; color sets merged with the figure). By



**Figure 2.8** Mimi Smith, *Steel Wool Peignoir*; 1966, steel wool, nylon and lace, 59 × 26 × 8 in. Photo: Oren Slor

1981 she had zeroed in still closer to herself in a series of full-color horizontals, many of which show her lying down, as do several of the film stills. Pose remained her focus. (Pose and suppose.) The images do not evoke a larger, more mysterious whole so much as fragments, period. Sherman's model shots offer no narrative clues. Any story that might be suggested is merely a cliché, standing for itself, demanding no past, no future, no continuity. There seems to be no intention of investing the figures with real lives, real stories, although this may be less a matter of intention than of acting deficiency. In *Untitled #93*, 1981 (plate 41), a disheveled blonde in bed is pulling dark sheets up to her chin and looking out apprehensively. (The camera angle is from above her head.) The image has consistently, and reasonably, been read as a not entirely subtle allusion to before or after sex, possibly intrusion and rape. Sherman, however, says she is "a woman with a bad hangover being awakened by sunlight just one or two hours after going to sleep."<sup>21</sup>

The passivity of the protagonists in the early work belied the activity of the artist defining herself and women's condition. At that time, Sherman's personae certainly appeared to be either victims or potential victims, differing rather drastically from the empowerment intended by 1970s transformations. The 1981 horizontal series commissioned by *Artforum*, deliberate parodies of skin-mag centerfolds, were actually quite frightening, even moving; many women have read them as pre- or postrape images. Sherman intended the series to ex-

amine vulnerability. It was disturbing not because the photographs were titillating but because the subjects *were* so vulnerable. If the model wasn't cowering on the floor she was waiting by the telephone or pathetically clutching a personals ad.

These have been called Sherman's first mature works, and indeed the subjects are women rather than the earlier images of girls or girls pretending to be women. The characters never seemed to me to be playing roles so much as escaping from beneath the surfaces of roles. At the time I was troubled by such ambiguous and sometimes "retrochic" images of women using their bodies the way men did, even though I knew they were supposed to be resistant parodies. How would the innocent viewer recognize a feminist point of view? I even had trouble with Sherman's film stills, which look harmless enough in retrospect. This in turn disturbed Sherman herself. In a 1983 interview she told Tom Thompson, "It bothers me when the meaning is misinterpreted in a negative way. . . . I may think a photograph is successful in exposing sexism. Other people may think that I'm reinforcing a sexist view of women. . . . People think I'm exploiting those kinds of characters when I'm not." On the other hand she never uses titles because she does not want to impose an interpretation: "I don't want to influence someone's way of looking at it."<sup>22</sup>

After the centerfold series came a group of more or less straightforward (though always Posed, with a capital P) quasi-self-portraits in a red bathrobe, in which the drama had simmered down to a kind of sulk. These were followed by a rather uninteresting group of pictures in which the young artist continued to try on *looks*. Enigmatic identities were layered on. The hair changed, the face was angled and sometimes distorted. There are pictures from 1983 where she is actually smiling. In some she becomes a kind of all-American girl. (Untitled #118, 1983 [plate 42], actually commissioned as an advertisement for a clothes designer, offers an odd concoction—a strong, fearless and bland Pollyanna retaining a trace of feminist undertones.) Although Sherman's work of the early '80s is masterful disguise, it is still disguise, beneath which the persona (possibly the self?) is always the same: pensive, vulnerable, apprehensive, fearful—and in hiding.

In her role as director, Sherman deals with self, and as designer she deals with body, exploring the effect of fashion, or just plain *clothing*, on both body and self. Following up on suggestions made by Mimi Smith's freestanding costumes of the 1960s (the famous steel wool peignoir [fig. 2.8]), she predicted the later sensuously vacant garments of Beverly Semmes and others. Sherman's Untitled #168, 1987, is a woman's dress-for-success outfit lying slightly rumpled in a cellarlike room, a field of dust and discarded objects. There is just the faintest suggestion of a skull beyond the collar, seen in a dimly lit, bluish darkness evoking the "Grade Z" horror movies that Sherman once fantasized about acting in. ("I always thought it would be great to be covered with blood and screaming while you're being hacked to pieces. . . ."<sup>23</sup>) This piece is really a still life (*nature morte*, indeed). It epitomizes the melodramatic neutrality that is Sherman's trademark.

The degree of transparency and opaqueness in Sherman's images continues to be debated and is one of her work's most enduring virtues. There is some question as to how far her stylization took her in the late 1970s and early 1980s toward unveiling the clichés she appeared to celebrate/decelebrate. Although these images were immensely successful, they didn't really work. Maybe their precarious balance on the edge of failure is what made them so popular. As Sherman's art continues to develop, psychological mood has been overwhelmed by lighting, capitulating in a sense to photography—light's medium. The camera's power and viewpoints take on a new importance, and a sci-fi harshness changes her features, allowing her to look less and less "like herself." As we enter the period of Sherman's costume dramas in the mid-1980s—the art history series, sex pictures, and beyond—masks and mannequins begin to stand in for the artist's face and body. The self, or selves, dissolve into pure fiction. The more flamboyant mythological/pornographic images leave behind the early focus on a general female experience. Sherman emerges as the actress rather than the protagonist in these comments on the worlds of fashion and historical romance. The transformation is complete.

Or perhaps the advent of the costume and tableau works admitted the impossibility of her initial task. The self was exhausted and scattered, replaced by an inexhaustible reservoir of archetypal bodies and identities. At this point Sherman seems to have escaped critical theory into her own world, where she can reassemble the scattered selves. Her evolution from investigations of stereotypical vulnerability to comedic nightmares is one of the most imaginative trajectories to emerge from 1970s transformation art.

## NOTES

1. Katy Kline, "In or Out of the Picture: Claude Cahun and Cindy Sherman," in *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self Representation*, ed. Whitney Chadwick (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 73. In the end, Cahun concluded that "to play with ourselves can change nothing." (Ibid., 74).
2. Martha Wilson, quoted in Lucy R. Lippard, "Transformation Art," *Ms.*, October 1975; reprinted as "Making Up: Role-Playing and Transformation in Women's Art," in Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan* (New York: The New Press), 94.
3. Thom Thompson, "A Conversation with Cindy Sherman," in *Cindy Sherman*, ex. cat. (Stony Brook, N.Y.: State University of New York Art Gallery, 1983), n.p.
4. Julia Ballerini, "Artificiality and Artifice: The Portraits of Diane Arbus and Cindy Sherman," *Center Quarterly* (Catskill Center for Photography) 4, no. 1, (1982): n.p.
5. Ibid., n.p.
6. Lippard, "Transformation Art," 102. See this article for many more examples of role-playing art from the 1970s than I could include here. The decided differences between "body art" and "transformation art" have been blurred in the intervening two decades. There also remains a good deal to be said about the differences between public and private acting out, between "persona" performances in art venues and in public places, and between performance and photography/video mediums.
7. Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), xxiii.
8. Along with self-determination, I also felt (then and now) that "exorcism—of an imposed sex role, of authority figures, of social expectations, or of childhood hangups" was the subject of many of these artists' work." (Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan*, 95).
9. Carolee Schneemann, quoted in Lippard, "The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: European and American Women's Body Art," *Art in America*, May-June 1976; reprinted in *The Pink Glass Swan*, 103.
10. Lea Vergine, *Il Corpo come Linguaggio* (Milan: Prearo, 1974); quoted in Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan*, 103.

11. Wilson's early 1970s drag piece was titled *Posturing: Drag*. Adrian Piper's performative male alter ego was the "Mythical Being," identified by mustache and (in the street) an Afro wig. David Bate wrote of Cahun: "To become not-a-woman and not-a-man in representation is to become what?" (quoted in Kline, "In or Out of the Picture," 73). Sherman did a few pieces as a man but never got into it.
12. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite.
13. Adrian Piper, quoted in Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan*, 92.
14. Eleanor Antin, quoted in Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan*, 93.
15. *Ibid.*, 93.
16. Chadwick, *Mirror Images*, 7.
17. Claude Cahun, quoted in Therese Lichtenstein, "A Mutable Mirror: Claude Cahun," *Artforum*, April 1992, 66.
18. Thompson, "A Conversation with Cindy Sherman," n.p.
19. Katy Kline, "In or Out of the Picture: Claude Cahun and Cindy Sherman," in Chadwick, *Mirror Images*, 69.
20. Laura Mulvey, "A Phantasmagoria of the Female Body: The Work of Cindy Sherman," *New Left Review* 188 (July/August 1991): 143.
21. Cindy Sherman, paraphrased by I. Michael Danoff, "Afterword: Cindy Sherman: Guises and Revelations," in *Cindy Sherman* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 196. In the same book (p. 9), Peter Schjeldahl writes irrelevantly: "Disturbingly, a lot of people, ignoring the women's obvious solitude, imagined rape scenarios." What obvious solitude?
22. Thompson, "A Conversation with Cindy Sherman," n.p.
23. Dike Blair, "A Chat with Cindy Sherman," *Flash Art*, March–April 1996, 82.

3

# HEROINES

Claude Cahun, translated by Norman MacAfee

Andromeda to the Monster: in  
memory of the *Legendary Moralities*\*

EVE THE TOO CREDULOUS

*You must avoid drugs of all kinds, especially those  
recommended in newspapers for curing every malady.*

*The Eleventh Commandment*

*(Appeared in an ad recommending a certain medicine  
—they were probably afraid of the competition.)*

\* This refers to a work by Jules Laforgue, published in *Le Mercure de France* in 1897, which describes Ruth as the “the unfortunate and typical heroine.” *Ed.*

The “Heroines” manuscript is a very well known unknown work. Though it was never published in full during Cahun’s lifetime, excerpts appeared in *Mercure de France* and *Le Journal Littéraire* in 1925, early in her literary career. In 1992, this fictional series of monologues was mentioned, indeed described, by François Leperlier in his book *Claude Cahun: L’écrit et la métamorphose*. Interested in its potential relevance for the exhibition/book *Inverted Odysseys*, I went looking for it when I visited the Jersey Museums Service archive, which houses Cahun’s personal papers. Ultimately, after much ado, I found the manuscript, missing only a few pages, buried at the bottom of a box—and it is here translated and published in its entirety for the first time. The arrangement of text on pages and decorative devices at the end of certain chapters—created using a typewriter—follows as closely as possible Cahun’s original manuscript. *Ed.*

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To the “Evettes,” little correspondents on the newspaper *Eve*—and in general to all young girls, past, present, and future.

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY. Would you like to become stronger, to succeed at everything you do? Act now: *As soon as you eat of this fruit, your eyes will be opened and you will be LIKE GODS, knowing good from evil.* Demand the flavorful fruit. There is ONLY ONE. Ask for it now without delay! You have nothing to lose. You must be completely satisfied, or your money will be cheerfully refunded.

“Serpents in luminous rings form supple letters, then other letters for subsequent advertisements.

“I love spending the evening in the perfumed shade of the trees (are they not generous? their perfume is free), to await the metamorphosis of these marvelous promises.—It’s a distraction, and our garden has hardly any. Ah! if only Adam would give me some more pocket money!

“Let’s see, the serpents are excited . . .”

LONELY men, I have a sweetheart for you.<sup>1</sup>

“No, that’s none of my affair! And I won’t let my guy come here. He’s so weak when it comes to women!” (She laughs.)

1. For those who don’t know English: LOVE says: Add a bowstring to your bow by learning LIVING LANGUAGES.—Eve: since languages, it’s like living color, *it’s modern*. The Tower of Babel, it’s the way things are. There are even people who say it wasn’t even built. If you ask my opinion, I prefer stucco. Stucco is very popular this year. Me, I love everything that’s new, original!

"That's not so true; it's inappropriate! We're looking for something else! . . .  
Ah! here's something better . . ."

Pep—tabs<sup>2</sup>  
BE A MAN  
You must have pep—vigor—strength  
—youth—to fully enjoy life—  
Make your sex life a joy!  
—Quick results—  
PEP—TABS

They positively help to build up  
weakened, nervous and aging men  
to such a state of thrilling,  
pulsating power that they STAND  
UP and shout: "I CAN! I WILL!!  
I AM FIT!!!" (only two dollars a packet)

"Oh! what a pity: too expensive! I really would have loved to give him  
that. He needs it so much, poor dear! . . ."

Are you reaching for TRUTH?<sup>3</sup>  
I will tell you for FREE!

(only send the exact date of your  
birth and enclose ten cents.)  
A GREAT SURPRISE AWAITS YOU

"But what is my birthday?—I'll have to ask Father. I'm too ignorant by  
half!"

BE an ARTIST<sup>4</sup>  
EASY method. Write for terms and  
list of SUCCESSFUL GENIUSES.

"Why can't I do it? Why not me?"

2. This and next thirteen lines are in English in the original.

3. This and the next four lines are in English.

4. This and next two lines are in English.

What would he say if he saw his little woman become a great painter, a great poet, the glory of Paradise?—It's strange, but these ideas are making me hungry! Don't they have anything to eat around here?..."

Quick PEP<sup>5</sup>  
Get NEW pep in TWENTY MINUTES  
Guaranteed or your money back  
GIVE ONE TO YOUR FRIEND

"It's nice.—But, do you really mean we can eat it? Whatever can it taste like?..."

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY . . .

"There it goes again.—Finished for this evening.—They don't have many advertisements!—Whose can that be, the gods'? Is it pleasant? . . .—But, a fruit, it is sorely tempting! . . . They told me that after sucking seven very green sloes, one girl became a boy. But I don't believe that. . . . There's just too big a difference." (enraptured) "What? The fruit—it's an apple!—it costs only thirty-nine sous? . . . That's quite an opportunity.—I'll buy it. Where is the tree? . . . This one, in the middle of the garden? . . . But Father says it's sterile!—or else, that the fruit is sour, good only for fattening pigs!—Doubtless, Father knows nothing about it. He's no gourmand. Besides, he likes to grumble:—maybe he's got stomach troubles—he always thinks the dinner's spoiled.

"It's true: this little apple is exquisite. I want to bring Him back one fourth of it; that will do him some good (*Give one to your friend!*)—one fourth for him, one fourth for Adam, one fourth for Eve.—I'm not selfish, not me!"

Now, no sooner had God swallowed the indigestible apple—cleverly hidden in one of the expert little dishes the Woman was making him—than he was seized by a violent anger. (Obviously he had a stomach ache.) He drove the Couple from Paradise; called them back, expelled them—he was decisive.

Such advertisements were partly true, alas!—and partly false. The Father, his children, all the apple-eaters, had learned, in fact, thanks to the fruit, that Good existed and that Evil existed—but, eternally tormented, they cannot recognize Which is Which. (Besides, as the advertisement says, one fourth is not enough.)

5. This and the next three lines are in English.

However, those who are happier but even more mischievous, who arrange objects in two distinct armies, have all bitten, each into a different flesh (of the Apple that is the apple of discord.)

(Only what is theirs is pure.) They do not tolerate the odor of another breath.



**DELILAH, WOMAN AMONG WOMEN**

*Delilah made Samson sleep upon her knees and made him lay his head upon her breast; and having made a barber come, she had him shave the seven locks of his hair; she began then to drive him off and push him away from her because his strength abandoned him at that moment.*

**(JUDGES 16)**

for J. G.

I have promised him to the High Priest. He is the enemy of my people, of my gods, That One—who scorned me . . . The natural enemy of woman. On him will I avenge all my sisters.—In short, I do not love men. *I know them not; nor do I desire to know them.* I am both virgin and savage.

Will it be possible to tear out his secret without paying with my flesh? . . . I fear defeat. If I were to betray my repulsion (the male does not forgive at such moments)—oh! I'd be lost! . . .

But the seduction, such a delight! Yes, that's it, my big scene. Pray that Dagon allows me a long speech and some beautiful effects. The folds of my cloak are truly eloquent. I would make wonderful gestures—and if I had to sacrifice to reality (the role is worth the pain!), now, I'm sure of it, I would know how to keep his interest to the end.

I wish he would come! That they would bring him to me: The bull for the cape!—If you love those near you, that's what matters: I am rich . . . *There he is . . . Ab!* I will succeed.

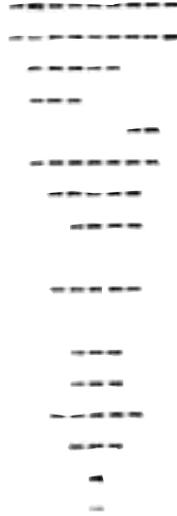
O brute! adorable brute . . . O sweetness . . .

—Awaking. Day already! *The lark? No, not the lark, the nightingale still . . .*  
—These scissors! What crime will I commit? A crime, truly! What to do? . . .  
He took my soul—and I no longer have weapons to resist my destiny.

I am so weak this morning, and can only obey vows made before.—A slave of the past.

It's done. But perhaps, only for me? . . . Alas no! He's like a baby.

“Samson, what did you do with your strength? . . . You pretend that it is I, I who have . . . Damned, ah! damned! . . . I will remove myself from the world; *I will go to a cloister* . . . What do you say? Your religion will be mine. This evening, I swear to you, by the High Priest himself, before our reunited people, I, Delilah the infidel, I will have myself CIRCUMCISED.



**THE SADISTIC JUDITH**

Who  
Was  
Judith?

She made for herself on the roof of her house a secret chamber where she lived shut away . . .

And, wearing a hair shirt, she fasted every day of her life, except for the Sabbath days . . .

Discourse  
of  
Judith  
to the  
People

I do not want you to try to find out what I plan to do . . .

But those . . . who appeared impatient . . . They were exterminated by *the exterminating angel*, and have perished from the bites of serpents.

This is why we do not appear impatient . . .

But let us consider that these punishments are *still far less* than our sins . . .

Discourse  
of Judith  
to Holofernes

All the world proclaims that you are the only one whose power . . . and your *military discipline* is praised in all the nations.

(*JUDITH VIII and IX*)

To Erich von Stroheim

“We have to believe that he despises women, and doesn’t hide it (after all, he himself says so); that he is coarse, as only a warrior can be. After he kissed his slave, he would furtively wipe his lips. He doesn’t remove his garments for fear of soiling his body more than absolutely necessary. During nights of love, his boots are stained with the crimson in which he wallows, symbolically dyed with the red poison of his victims, tracking everywhere, according to the season, the dust or mud of the roads, or worse. But at cock crow, he has his bath, sends the girl away—and has the sheets changed (blood clotted on silk sheets).

“They also say he is the ugliest of men; and those who fear he will seduce their servants maintain that he looks like a pig.

“But I saw him, as his victorious army marched past our closed doors, for (having silently slit the throat of my dog, whose agitation disturbed me) I could peer through the keyhole:

“How he pleases me, with his receding hairline, with his dead eyes, so slow moving—his little narrow eyes, his enormous eyelids; his fleshy but not too prominent chin; his bestial mouth with its sensual lips, but with the same skin, it seems to me, as the rest of his face—the mouth, that slit of a mouth, is admirably designed, expressive, and as soon as it opens like a crown cut in half, somber, it shows off his canine teeth sharpened to a point like Judith’s fingernails!

“Ah, above all, how these fan-shaped ears please me, and this nape with its short hairs—and the superb vertical line of his cranium at the neck when it bends his head backwards, broken by reptilean folds! I love them because I recognize in them the distinctive, hateful characteristics of the enemy race.

“A woman is on the move.—Toward the camp of the conqueror! . . .

“A bird without wings, tiny, fallen from the nest, is at my feet. I kneel down (it’s alive!), I hold it in my hand. Its down is more delicate, dear panic-stricken heart, sweetness, defenseless sweetness, more delicate than the tummy of your mother, than the strands of russet moss and silk rejoined by her careful work . . .” He is almost reassured, warmer than my feverish armpit. I hold him clasped in my arms—O caress of his newborn feathers! . . .—Let’s go! . . . and I hold a bit tighter—so he doesn’t fall, to feel him burning against my flesh, to cool himself, for a spasm—then he dies! . . .

"*It is an evil omen.*—Disgusting! . . . Why disgust? Would life be as honest, more honest than death?—At least *this* cadaver is not a burden.

"Will I be strong enough to carry him all by myself—the other one—or should I dismember him, choosing the best parts? . . .

"—Oh! I've scared myself! But it means nothing; I was only thinking about it . . . joking about it.

". . . Am I truly condemned, a criminal since childhood, to destroy everything I love? No: he will prevent the infamous sacrifice. Is he not my chosen one because he's the strongest one?—Barbarian! Enslave me; at first I give myself only to your crudest body, I give what I have learned to cherish least. Beware of this mouth, this nape, these ears—beware of all that can bite, tear, and suck until your foreign blood is exhausted—delicious!

"It's your fault! Why didn't you see into me? Why didn't you free me from my executioners? I still loved you, I would have died happy. I wanted to conquer you and you let yourself be conquered! . . .

"What good are these reproaches? He doesn't listen to me; he can't listen to me . . .

"To myself: Why do I have to conquer him? (And have I therefore wanted to stop loving you, Holofernes?)—Childish, so childish! . . . Why do we eat? We ask the question only when we are no longer hungry . . .

"And then there are my brothers! They have nothing to fear, because they loathe me. Fatherland, prison of my soul! Shut away, I have at least known how to see the bars, and see between the bars . . ."

The people of Israel applaud Judith.

But she, at first more astonished than a baby whom one mistreats, lets herself be carried in triumph—as though asleep. Very soon she awakens, intoxicated with laughter and insolence, and, raised on the pedestal of human flesh, she exclaims:

"People! *What do we have in common?* Who allowed you to penetrate my private life? to judge my acts and find them beautiful? to burden me (I who am so weak and weary, eternally hunted) with your abominable glory?"

But her words were not understood, nor even heard. The joy of a crowd has a thousand mouths—and no ears.



**THE TEASE**

(Penelope the Irresolute)

*Still, the suitors feel guilt not toward you but toward  
your mother, who truly has a treasure trove of tricks. It is  
already three years, nearly four, that she has deceived the  
hearts of the young Greeks; she gives them all hope; she  
makes promises to each; she sends messages; but in her soul,  
her thoughts are the opposite.*

*Homer*

for A. G.

Choose! They want me to choose among them. What a bore! Of course Antinous is beautiful, Antinous, son of Eupitheus; but Eurymachus, son of Polybus, isn't bad either. It is so hard to decide, from among the skeins of wool, which one I prefer, and what will be the weft of the fabric. Everything depends on the light. The threads change according to the day, gray or the color of honey . . . But to accept one man, and especially to send the others away—it's a terrible responsibility!

Ulysses didn't win me without cunning. There were the obligations that he had to Icarus, my father, which obliged me to marry him.—If, returned from his distant voyage, he could mingle with the suitors, be nice, without rancor—what a joy: I'd have an extra lover! But I'm unsure about his heart. And in endless doubt, better he wander the sea on pathways ceaselessly erased by the waves . . . The feel of the sea spray will make him see *the tears I have not shed*. I am careful, and salt is bad for the eyelids.

An eternal feast goes on in my palace. For they all have different customs—thanks to the skill of the goddesses who preside over our loves. I drink, I eat with them; I caress their hardened breasts—all those points that please me. I'm happy!

Only one witness somewhat cramps our revels: he holds onto his heritage. Poor suitors! Today do stepsons have terrible stepmothers?—(What did you say, Medon? Telemachus, feeling threatened, has left? Ah! so much the better, so much the better. Provided he doesn't bring his father back! . . .)

At night, I suffer from insomnia. Because of this malady, sometimes I would love to welcome someone into my bed—*Ah! if only I wouldn't have to refuse the others, and perhaps the worthiest one* . . . I suffer an insomnia sweet and less vain than a dream . . .

For my favorite of the moment I weave a tunic to fit his beautiful body, a cloak to sum up his soul. And the changing warp, *the color of time*, gives me a pretext: "It is the shroud of Laërtes," I say to them in my subtlest manner; "I will choose not to finish it."

Now, the sleep of the men is not half through when my mad preference weakens:—To embellish my plan, I want to add to it this faded purple . . . I forget! For whom did I intend the tunic? Eurynomus's skin is too pink. It

would be better for Leocritus. However it is of Cestippus I think when I undo my work; it is for him that I want to begin all over again tomorrow.

Delicious child, drunk since morning, he pursues one of my servant girls. I stop him and inquire about his tastes: "*Do you love mauve, my love? . . .*"

But the stars are not yet many in the sky when already Melanthus, the slave Melanthus, has reconquered my heart.—Mauve, it's so drab! Talk to me instead of a hot-blooded red, streaked with blue lines—a bit of gold just visible in the weft . . . I do not have any metal or silk so pure. Tomorrow I will look . . .

But tomorrow Liodus is with me. He knows what to choose. He suggests this white wool, velvety, sweet as the down of a young dove, and woven with a thread of gold, a thread of silver. How could I refuse? Of course the tunic will be for him. Proudly his pale hair and skin will compare their brilliance to the color of the moon. He will be the virgin consecrated to Diana and I will have the sacrilegious joy of initiating him and corrupting him . . .

But, returning to the feast, I hear the singer Phemios, and I am swept away by his voice. I will weave the heroic poem that he composes with such genius, which describes, which imagines the wanderings and death of the unhappy Ulysses. Most certainly, this time it really is a wedding cloak that fits my new husband! In the night I no longer undo my work. *The immense and delicate cloth* will be soon completed. My secret marriage is readied.

—All of a sudden the unhoped-for return of Ulysses, the murder of the suitors . . . Only Phemios is spared—O gods! Ulysses has returned too late! (it seems he was a bit lulled beside Calypso . . .) Now he gives me the life of Phemios. I promised. I will keep my promise: the singer will be my lover. Ulysses will know about it, but he will pretend not to.—Don't confuse Ulysses with Menelaus.—What! Did I say anything to tarnish his ill-gotten glory? Ah! if I can sully it as easily as his bed! To burn the laurels, to burn them when still green, is a pleasure unique to woman! . . . But he'll know how to keep his own safe. Sly fox! He'll exalt his most chaste wife, and like a coward violate her from behind—and make her shriek between the thick walls.

Oh gods who brutalize mortals!—To choose, to submit: words as flatterers, words as liars.

—They are the same.

**HELEN THE REBEL**

*. . . He wants us to be a subject of songs for ages  
to come.*

*. . . with the desire for her first husband, for her  
homeland, for her parents, she rushes from the wedding  
chamber, shedding tears of tenderness.*

**HOMER**

for the "Actor"

I know quite well I'm ugly, but I do my best to forget it. I make myself beautiful. In everything I do, and especially in the presence of mine enemy, *I behave absolutely as though I were the most beautiful woman in the world. It is the secret of my charm.* It's a lie!—and I will end up letting myself be taken.

When Menelaus married me, I was young and, despite my birth, unknown. But I loved him. He's so blond! Already through instinct, a woman's instinct, I played for him my role of goddess: (Daughter of Jupiter and Leda.—No, not of Leda, of Venus. Venus also wanted to taste the swan.) I dazzle him. The arrows of my little brother pierce his eyes. I will swear to never belong to any mortal in the world: Helen is reserved for the bed of the gods. In short, I made her more expensive; and I knew how to place my possession at so high a price he no longer thought about haggling over my value.

Once we were married (*Why cry over spilled milk—or wine?*), it didn't take him long to understand what could be done with me: He would launch *Helen the beautiful*. Out of vanity and a bit of vengeance, he wanted to prove that there are others beastlier still than he. He won't stop until he sees all the kings in the world groveling at my feet.

My beginnings were rather difficult: as the lover of Menelaus, I reluctantly flirted with other men. I have to admit, I must have committed some notorious gaffes. I attracted the most discouraging rejections. Patroclus sent me packing: "*Don't even think about it! Go to Achilles' and ask where I am!*" I was innocent then: I believed that because of our ambitions, the catastrophe would be definitive. I wept. Menelaus reassured me. Always he had confidence in my genius. Never did he doubt his Helen.—Anyway, too bad for Patroclus: his reputation shielded mine.

Agamemnon was my first lover.—Excellent bait to attract more. Apart from that, only mediocre success; I really believe that he took me only to please his brother. He treated me like a servant. He couldn't resist the pleasure of laughing—holding my chin toward him, the greatest of men: "*It is not that you are pretty pretty . . . and yet!*" Luckily, that happened within the family! The Epic Poets, those notorious gossips, were not in the house. No matter,

Menelaus was restless. The scene could have happened again. It was time to train me. He had me given lessons in seduction.

On the pediment of the Temple, you can read in pink letters:

The ART of FASCINATION  
and of MAGNETISM

Under the porticoes, you can walk while you study and count your steps, and meditate upon the maxims inscribed on these signs hung at carefully posted resting places:

Hercules said:

IMPOSSIBLE is not a GREEK word

—and another:

IMPOSSIBLE is the favorite adjective of IMBECILES

.....

Nothing succeeds

like SUCCESS:

LAUGH and the world laughs with you;  
cry and you cry alone.

.....

.....

The four theological virtues

are:

CONFIDENCE in yourself,

AMBITION,

PERSEVERANCE, and GOOD HUMOR.

.....

.....

.....

Have ORDER around you, but  
also IN YOUR THOUGHTS.

A place for everything  
and everything in its place.

.....

.....

Don't forget that EACH MAN has A WEAK SPOT.

All you need do is find IT.

.....

We are ALL AT THE MERCY OF clever FLATTERERS  
YOU SHOULD LEARN HOW TO BE ONE TOO

"When I left school (where of course they promised to teach the students professional secrets like DISCRETION and SECURITY) they handed me a precious little manual that summarizes their daily exercises and most important recommendations:

"Exercises for serenity, breathing, deportment, walking, voice, the gaze—the most irresistible way to flirt with men.

"To get angry, but harmoniously; to cry, following the rules of esthetics; to smile with the lips only; to know the exact degree of shame that suits the virgin and fits the matron; for the choice of vestments and jewels, and to know how to feign the difficult simplicity that made naive Alexander believe: 'At least that won't cost me too dearly! . . .'

"The most important beauty exercise is as follows:

"To sit comfortably in a darkened room . . . and *think of nothing*. Just that, every day, for a few minutes—gradually and indefinitely increasing the time."

With great precision, I practice the system of the Master. I possess it in letter and spirit. I have faith in him—and it is the final favor that he wishes us.

I will sign for him all the testimonials he wants. Because, Menelaus is right, "I could seduce the Sirens with my voice; I could fascinate serpents with my glance."

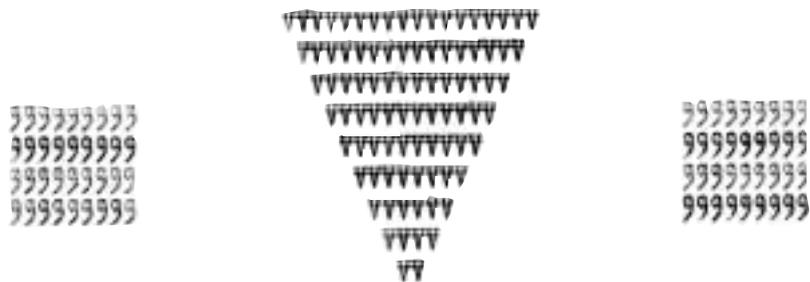
Of course I know that the subtle Ulysses recently figured us out; and that he dared say to Telemachus, who reproached him for compromising himself with me: "*Bab! It costs me so little and gives them so much pleasure. . . .*"

This crafty old man is terribly clairvoyant. Of course I know he doesn't even desire me, alas! Menelaus demands the conquest of Ulysses. (Which he himself carries out. He's so blond, so good looking, so talented.) Luckily Ulysses is one of those strange monsters whose body itself is a fabric of lies: they would make love to stones if it suited them! And he can gossip, but who believes him? Who takes the King of Ithaca seriously?

I would be living in peace if I hadn't had to follow Paris to obey my cruel husband, to procure for both of us this immortal glory, so dear to his heart—and so meaningless! . . .

Enough! Helen is rebelling. She doesn't believe in destiny, even less in the gods. *I tell you truly*, if I remove Menelaus by force—I've already slept with Priam and his sons!—I will see Lacedemon once again, and I'll even live chastely if I want!

I worked for you, dear Atrean, and now I reclaim my reward at last. You're too old now to be a procurer. We two must have, in the suburbs of Sparta, a country house, children, and peace and quiet.



**SAPPHO THE MISUNDERSTOOD**

*What do you want of me, daughter of Pandion,  
Uranian swallow? About you who are beautiful, my  
thoughts do not change: You are nothing to me. I do not feel  
the effects of my anger, and I am serene of spirit.*

*—Do I still mourn my virginity? I don't know where  
I'm running, for two thoughts are within me . . .*

SAPPHO

*. . . and the earth  
Filled full with deadly works of death and birth,  
Sore spent with hungry lusts of birth and death,  
Has pain like mine in her divided breath;  
Her spring of leaves is barren, and her fruit  
Asbes . . .*

SWINBURNE

for Chana Orloff

To create is my joy. No matter how little it is. My great flanks would contain a people. There are some days when I imagine Pallas will burst forth fully armed from my head, like a chick from the egg. Rhythms and tunes are born easily from my lyre. The words offer themselves, and, scanned on their own, they line up in my songs:

*Spente sua carmen numeros veniebat ad aptos,  
Et quod tentabam dicere, versus erat.*

*(On its own her song came fitted to numbers,  
And since she was trying to speak, it was verse.)*

Alas! the soothsayers have assured me that my womb is sterile.

—Sterile? It's possible, but not for sure. How to prove it with such lovers? All of them vicious, more lesbian than Sappho herself: Never have they demanded of her *the ordinary thing!*—Whether because of one thing or another, the result is obvious:

I cannot bear a child of my flesh—merely of the soul, a breath, of air . . . I believe in immortality but not in the value of the soul.

. . . I know: They attribute to me a daughter: Cleis.—But it's a conjectural child; she's only my adoptive daughter. I might explain how, during one of Cercolas's absences, I pretended to bring her into the world to avoid being divorced (many Athenians did the same). I could say (and am I so misunderstood, it would be more plausible), that he, still virile but growing old, having married a young girl *as is the custom with our people*, we had together—as is customary—chosen little Cleis to be our little doll.

But I must be frank, there's nothing to it. The child came to me of her own accord . . . (My servants know the instructions by heart: *Send the little girls to me.*) She was nine, and already had the temper of a tyrant. It was she who demanded this adoption, ensuring that I would be more attached to her . . .

Yes, it is my misfortune: *All women chase after me.* Is it my fault? Do you really believe I enjoy it!—Do I seem to have a penchant for it? Damn my father Scamandrogynus! Damn the sacred customs of Lesbos!—Ah! . . . if I could have fled . . .

I managed to have myself exiled with Alcaeus. We went to Syracuse. I was hoping then . . . but you know what poets are like! We split up: because of shabby professional jealousies, because his vanity was disappointed when I hadn't won the prize for most beautiful woman in the Temple of Hera—especially because of his bizarre mania for despising deeds, for pretending that for beings endowed with exceptional souls, such as he . . . such as I (this in a restrained, courteous voice), everything happens in sublime words. Thus the powerless console themselves. But how do their victims fare? Only boredom changes them.

Disgusted with poets, I fell in love with a young man from a good family, newly liberated from his teacher. I hoped that his virgin semen would perform a miracle in my womb.—He wanted to travel, to visit my native isle. He was curious about my glory. He was punished well for his curiosity!

Hardly had we landed than we were assaulted by the arms of a thousand women. Each one wanted to lead me in triumph to her bed. With great difficulty, I extricated myself, and shut myself away in our house with Phaon and Cleis. But even she did not let me rest after having repeated three times every caress known to woman! Phaon, a stranger to these rituals, takes umbrage at them. Impossible to take him with me along the deserted beach. He reproaches me for wearing a chlamys, the short chiton, baring my right breast, instead of the peplos with a double sash—and leaving my head uncovered. He wants to give lessons in fashion and bearing to Sappho, *the arbiter of lesbian elegance!* I do and say whatever I like: *With me, my dear, one never points such things out.* He is intimidated; he is afraid; he leaves the country.

I give way to despair. The only thing that remains for the abandoned woman is *to leap from the Leucadian cliffs.*

All the people, amassed on the beach, saw me above, at once immense and minuscule, at the tip of the fatal rock.—I'm no fool! It was only a mannequin of hers that Cleis, hidden, pushed into the violet sea. (They do the same thing in the movies.) Atthis<sup>6</sup> has good ears: Did she not hear my cry of agony as I smashed against the reefs?

While far from shore, seated in my boat, singing low, and tuning my lyre, I was peacefully awaiting the evening . . .

At night—like my sisters, the Sirens, less shameless than my mortal sisters, I lure passersby, preferably of the female variety, and drown them with my strong hands . . .

When one renounces creation, only destruction remains: For no one living can stand upright—unmoving—on the wheel of fate.

6. One of Sappho's pupils. *Trans.*

**THE VIRGIN MARY\***

When Joseph threatened to send me away, I was still a virgin, though already heavy with the living being, too living, which disgraced me in his eyes. I was very ignorant and understood nothing about it: Well! since our engagement, my betrothed had so often tried to make me his woman, without succeeding at anything other than reciprocal sorrows followed by a noble exchange of reproaches, and sometimes of insults. I have to believe that something in me was too hard, too rebellious toward the male—something in him too weak, too reserved around girls. We would give it up, without however changing our plans: With our situations in harmony, this would be an excellent marriage of convenience.

Soon, I realized that my belly was swelling horribly. My neighbor, taking pity on me, wanted me to have an abortion.—But where? How to manage it? Faced with my need, she remained dumfounded; I was a monster, in my place she would have gone mad . . . (Was she sent from the angels? She left the country. I asked no more. It's my life—no more submitting to the needs of others!)

Joseph stayed. It remained for him to prove that the child was truly his . . . And whose else would it be, Lord? Every woman is made to be a mother, and Mary above all (it's true, it's my vocation!)—Touched by my sterility, without our knowing, Gabriel had come to our aid: As we slept, like a honey-bee playing the go-between to fertilize the flowers, he had given to Mary what belonged to Joseph. It was not difficult . . . Here, Gabriel stopped to smile. Joseph, who had erotic dreams, blushed and grew flustered . . .

Hope returned to us. Rid of my virginity, with the child born, we could get to know one another. We could be happy. We could continue to make children . . .

First came Jesus. At the beginning he was charming. I nursed him myself and I have never forgotten his delicate sucking, already almost intelligent, that dictator with his round mouth, that gourmand with his swollen lips.

*He was an extraordinary child! unbelievably precocious!* At five, he could already tell a cow from a donkey in the stable, and called them each by name. At seven, he had learned all by himself to blow into a wooden pipe his father

\* The missing pages of the "Heroines" manuscript are the first (title) and the last page of this section. *Ed.*

had hollowed out for him—and whistled with it like a blackbird. If he fought with his comrades, you could be sure he thrashed them; or else that he was honorably beaten. He had no fear of the water: he came to me to see how to wash his face; even better, at thirteen, he went bravely into the river, and paddled like a little fish.

I don't say this because he's my son. No, really!—*all the world agrees*—for intelligence, beauty, and courage he has no equal. And if you could see how he loves his mother! . . . He required almost no coaxing, and only jokingly, for the evening kiss. *All right* he loves his father too. He chats with him, works quietly with him. But *is it the same thing?* There is duty, and then there is pleasure . . .

At twelve, he caused me a great sorrow: he escaped from our house, and, how can I say it?, insulted the priests in the temple, then played on their towers, mocking them.—What do you want? After all, boys will be boys—and even the better ones . . .

I growled at him severely: "What were you doing there, you scamp? Son of a bitch! Ah! what a mess! But to wait for a child who to give birth to the world had to violate his own mother?" (The head especially, because of the halo . . . That wasn't funny, I assure you. All of human sorrow is a pin prick learned from my sorrows.) When I said these words to him, while lightly shaking him, I remember quite well that he cried. He had such a tender heart!

Of course, I proclaimed in the village that he had debated with very wise doctors and had totally confounded them. Perhaps that was true, after all: Since then, it has never been contradicted.

Oh well! At thirty, this heartless monster left his hearth, his country, his entire family, to wander throughout the world! . . .

I must have heard the most diverse opinions:

Certain people came to me with sad faces and a voice for the occasion, never without the bitterest condolences: "But my poor Mary! you must be suffering so! That Magdalene must have committed abominable seductions to have so alienated him from you . . . His father must be so unhappy!"—But I didn't let myself be fooled. Furious, like a she-wolf, I countered: "It's all right for you, unbelievers, to believe things like that. There's no truth to them. My son writes me regularly; and his cousin John the Baptist gives me news of him. They both went off in search of the Messiah . . . I don't doubt it . . . I am

quite alone—what else do you want, it's the destiny of mothers!—but I am very happy to see him making his way in the world!" (Nevertheless, I went to Joseph to complain: "That's what they said to me. Ah! how well he behaves, *your* son!")

On the other hand, others pretended to understand, to love Jesus better than myself! . . . That I would not tolerate! To all their ridiculous praise, and their miracles, and their parables, I responded quite simply: "Anyone can see that you don't know him! It is not you who suffered the pain of bearing him! . . . And Magdalene! and John, this curly-haired blond! . . . Ah! I know everything, get away! . . . To see him die a thousand deaths rather than . . . To think that it is I who brought him into the world! Happily the Lord gave me his brothers, my consolation . . .—A man of genius, a poet? . . . It's quite possible! . . . What is it you want me to do? Is a man ever a genius to his mother? And then, it's not at all like that—the fabrications of idlers! . . . Before being a great man, he had to be an honest man, a brave worker—look: like Joseph!" (It isn't that Joseph is perfect. He lacks tact. Often I must have said to him: "It's not my boy who would treat women like that. Ah! I envy the one that he chooses." But that does not concern other people.)

I'm going crazy. I saw him on the cross, uncomplaining—a hero. Ever so sweetly he asked for something to drink. And to be unable to do anything for him!—I who would have poured my blood drop by drop on his lips (which were so beautiful), to quench his thirst, as in times past, and rock him sweetly on my breast: my little Jesus, my favorite child . . . O criminals! executioners! assassins!

John was admirable; and *my* Jesus found the strength again in the midst of his appalling agony to commend to me this faithful disciple. Surely John will be like my own son . . .

But such a pity that a young man so well endowed should not know carpentry, and that he writes such incomprehensible things. Even the title: The Apocalypse—now who would ever want to read that? . . . Ah! If my son were still alive! what a beautiful book he would have given us to read in the evening vigil! . . .

Yes, *my* son. Joseph has nothing to do with it, I realize now, but, actually, I always thought so. And I will cry out to him, if I were crucified in my turn:\*

\* Her last statement is missing from the manuscript. *Ed.*

**CINDERELLA, HUMBLE, HAUGHTY CHILD**

*She let fall one of her glass slippers, which the Prince  
carefully picked up.*

**PERRAULT**

My father remarried and I was very happy about it all. I'd always dreamed of having a stepmother. But heaven overwhelmed me, giving me two sisters by marriage. They were deliciously cruel. I especially loved the elder, who despised me delightfully: When she saw me always sitting in the cinders by the fireplace, whose warmth penetrated me with delight (sometimes even burning me), did her dear familiar voice not call me Kitchenella? Never was a word so sweet to my ears.

Sadly, they were pretty girls, marriageable maidens; they left us soon, leaving me with my parents, who, devoted to one another, regarded the world with a drunkard's tenderness—and included me in their superb universal indifference. I will do anything to avoid a marriage like that . . . But how would I do it? I with my loving nature, and so submissive? . . .

Moreover, I was feeling my pleasure diminishing day by day, and my feelings of ecstasy growing weak. I understood the reason for it (being devoted, for lack of anything better, to solitary reveries, I reflected a great deal on it): Such pleasures grow dull from force of habit. I was too lowly at present, too humiliated, to enjoy, vigorously, my daily humiliation. One has to climb up on the shores, on a high bank, to plunge again into the infinite sea of human pleasures. Daughter of a king, ah! *if I were queen!* . . . To wed, publicly to wed, the lowliest of my vassals, to make it seem that he forced me to abdicate, he mistreated me, he preferred the chattel of his village to me! . . . *How to make such fantasies real?*

My very wise godmother, Fairy Godmother, to whom I confessed my desires, came to my rescue. She knew our Prince very well (once upon a time, she'd assisted at his baptism), and revealed to me by which curious particularities one could seduce him:

He had a passion for women's shoes. To touch them; to kiss them; to let himself be trampled underneath their charming heels (pointed heels painted scarlet to look like splashes of blood); it is a modest joy that he has sought since he was a child. On this, though, the ladies of the court have not satisfied him: clumsy and timid, afraid of harming the heir to the throne, they dressed up in slippers. And, fearing he would kiss them in a vulgar manner, with every sign of respect they raised a foot up to his august but bitter mouth with its fixed smile . . . For this royal lover one must be the haughty mistress, the pitiless dominatrix in hard heels, someone I could be—I who understand! . . .

“Godmother, you demand the most terrible sacrifice of me! This man is the opposite of what my heart wants.”

—“I know that very well, my little one. But there's a reason. *Every sacrifice has its own reward*: You will feel in playing your part an emotion more profound than those you've so far known all too well. But blasé Cinderella, believe me: the most acute sweetness on earth (for you, the most vivid happiness) is to oppose this instinct, to violate and to chastise by turns. . . .”

Persuaded by my good godmother, I accepted her presents: three pairs of gray horses the color of cinders, a carriage, a coachman, six footmen; clothes of velvet and gold, dainty delicate slippers of squirrel fur (he adores fur) that she entrusted specially to me. . . .

She recommended that I be proud and fierce, as mysterious as the ideal, and to flee without fail on the stroke of midnight, the second night losing (but in full view of the Prince, who would be following me), my little left slipper.

(I have such small and compact feet, they seem stunted—because I regularly squeeze them into a vise of stiff linen and rigid lace, as the Chinese do. This exquisite, and habitual, torture fills me with pleasure . . .)

I obey. I saw the Prince, yesterday, and he importuned me vociferously. Alas! I guessed only too well his thoughts! and noticed the essential details . . . *He blushes at the subject of boots. He blushes*, he naively told me, *if he passes in front of a display of shoes, which seems to him the worst indecency*; but a display of flesh does not touch his tolerant and modest soul: It amazes him that anyone could complain about games so silly, and even a little repugnant.

I agree with him. And perhaps I could truly love him if he wanted sometimes to reverse our roles . . . One must not even dream of that: If I destroyed

his illusions, he would quite quickly return the cricket to the hearth!—I must deceive him to the grave.

What's important is to be Princess. When I become Princess, godmother helping it, I know quite well that I will have myself beaten by the least of my manservants.

Then I will don again my garb of the slovenly maid, those precious rags, with their color and smell of cinders, and every day, secretly, I will cover my crazy head; I will go out into the night. I will approach passersby (there's no lack of poor men or ugly men or even dishonest men), and the better I play my role for the dear Prince, the more marvelously intense for me will be this contrast and these humiliating encounters.



**MARGUERITE, INCESTUOUS SISTER**

Valentin

*In the past, when I'd carouse with my friends, each bragged, praising his beautiful women, all vying to speak, emptying their glasses, leaning on their elbows. Me, I said nothing, and twisting my beard and smiling, I let them talk, and when they'd finished, I began: "To each according to his taste. But is there one of yours in all the land to compare to my little Marguerite, anyone who could hold a candle to my sister?" "Tap, tap, kling, klang, we clinked glasses in turn, and everyone shouted: "He's right! She's a credit to her sex!" And they no longer praised anyone else. Now, I could tear my hair out, I could smash my head against the wall. Any rascal who wants can insult me. They whisper when I go by, letting me pass to the right. They sneer at me, like a worthless bankrupt!*

*In conversation, the slightest innuendo makes me blush! And even if I knocked them all senseless, would I have the right to call them liars? . . .*

**GOETHE**

*A sensual woman, is she truly a monster?* Is it my fault? When this evil began, I was too young, much too young to understand. And, to be sure, I was never insensitive to the *eternal masculine*. I don't know when I first felt this irresistible attraction nor when I first succumbed to it. My memory was not yet formed . . . Perhaps when *very old, one evening, by candlelight*, I will suddenly recall the origins, so long searched for, of my inexplicable penchant . . . And that evening, as dried up and cold as I would by then be, I know all too well, I won't be able to stop myself: Marguerite will once more sin against body and soul!

All I can say is that he who initiated me could have been none other than Valentin: My mother, who had good reason to suspect my precocious ardors, let me play only with him. Thus, because she has a pure heart, she believed she could sleep peacefully.

Here is my first sexual memory: as soon as I was alone in my room (which I shared with my brother), I seized his lead soldiers. I laid them on my lap (which represented the battlefield). The more there were, the happier I was. I heard the moans of the wounded; I gave them drink, bandaging their wounds and, when there was not enough water, washing them with my own saliva. A noncommissioned officer, grander and more muscular than the common soldiers, in a tight dolmen of a beautiful, lucky green, was, in my dream, Captain Valentin—whom I cherished above all. . . .

*(Daughter of a former superior officer . . . Luckily our father is dead! I'm so coquettish and coaxing that, if he were alive, I'd have surely obtained his favors. Mama, whether from indignation or jealousy, would have died at least ten years sooner.)*

My brother, starting school, unknotted my long gold braids, brushing my flowing hair in the sun, disentangling it with a golden comb (at least that's what it seemed to us). Then, in my childish voice (my voice has never changed), I sang "The Lorelei" to him. And we both of us felt, the one through the other, great sensual delights.

We were model children. We were an example to all the kids in the neighborhood, because such fraternal occupations *give joy to little people and tranquility to big ones*.

When Valentin chose the military field it seemed to me all my wishes were realized. I thought only of the glory. I was forgetting about the separation. Or rather, I was so naive that I believed I would go with him, to march

at his side. The sword belt of the attendant would gird my loins most agreeably. I would be the lover of young recruits with rosy cheeks. If war were declared (it has such a good effect on the male), I would find it a stimulant . . . Yes, Valentin returned to me always more loving, his fists bloodied, with a black eye, when after his billiard games, he'd brawl in the gutter. Suffering, is it not our ally, we women, the great consolers—*the sisters of charity?* . . .

One day I saw him arrive from the barracks, *in his tight-fitting new field-gray uniform, and I felt strange pangs in my heart—so sweet that I thought I would die from them!*

*(Today even the rattling of the saber of a pretty hussar will still, recalling him, give me a thrill of pleasure.)*

I had not foreseen his going away.—My God! that I would be alone! . . . And how to make him faithful? In vain do I go off to confession! . . .

If I meet a young man who pleases me physically, without even knowing his name, despite my lowered eyelids, I observe him, and want him immediately. I do everything to see him again. That lasts for a while, until I meet another. *Then the earlier one is completely forgotten; and I begin again with the second what I had done with the first. How to cure myself? Who is in the same state of mind as I?* I am completely in love with sex, with *beautiful sex*.

It would be, however, very vile to cheat on someone absent, who is perhaps even in danger of death, and thanks to whom I am pregnant!

It was this last motive alone that persuaded me to give in to Faust's solicitations. Otherwise, I would have resisted him, I swear!—In any case, I would have much preferred his mysterious companion, this Mephisto, who wears a sort of misshapen uniform, about which I was more than a little curious . . . Faust realizes it: whenever Mephisto is around, I no longer have eyes only for him.—And so he keeps his distance at our meetings.

It is this forbidden pregnancy and my reputation for chastity that are the causes of everything! Unable to discover my lover, they had no other suspect than my brother. Thus I incurred a blame a hundred times worse.—Faust seems to have a nature so dreamy, a complexion so poetic—I do not despair of convincing him to marry me. I am an honest girl and am in awe of Opinion. *Not to respect public opinion is always a sign of effrontery incompatible with the reserve and the moderation that must guard all the acts of well-balanced and respectable women.*

Unfortunately, Valentin returns unexpectedly. His jealous duel causes a scandal. His death pains me—even though it was deserved. I gave birth. My duty was to smother my baby—*the child of incest*, the only formal objection. I will not recoil. *I have never recoiled in the face of Duty.* (I have the experience of having already helped kill my little sister, whose cradle, between our twin beds . . . cluttered the room.) However, this time, I was clumsy and knew not to abide by the wise commandment: *drown without a trace.*<sup>7</sup>

It was terrible. I seriously dreamed of hiring as my lawyer this celebrated man who promised

#### REHABILITATION WITHOUT ANYONE KNOWING

Mephistopheles dissuaded me, proving to me (I know not how, though it seemed to me very clear at the time) that lost honor can't be found in the judge's chambers.

Faust visited me in prison and wanted to help me escape. My soul was troubled: Suddenly I mistook him for Valentin and would have willingly followed him. But immediately after, I recognized him: the murderer of my brother!—of my only love—and I refused to budge.

I regret to say that at present they are building a scaffold.

How do men dare condemn me, especially if they have sisters? Do you know then, o Judges, *do you know what awaits you?*—if it has not already happened . . .

7. Cahun writes this in German: *Spürlos versenken. Trans.*

**SALOME THE SKEPTIC**

*. . . That evening, when he returned to his village and they asked him, as on other evenings: Come on! Tell us: What did you see? He answered:—I saw nothing.*

*Oscar Wilde*

*(ANDRÉ GIDE: In Memoriam )*

*Too much brain, not enough heart—this word intended even in the most physical sense, if the gods have not given you the divine gift of feeling.*

*MARCEL COULON*

for O. W.

How strange they are, people who *believe that it has happened*. How can they? One thing only in life, the dream, seems to me beautiful enough, moving enough, to merit your becoming so disturbed that you have to laugh or cry.

I believed I'd found an end to my daily indifference (*the place and the formula*), a prolonging of my nights: art. (Ah, how young I was then!) Virgin, in fact, to my very soul, *I was not yet occupied with artistic questions*—this will be my excuse.

I quickly understood the horrible trap: painters, writers, sculptors, even musicians, copy life. Instead of deceiving her—this eternal spouse!—it was to her he would be the most faithful. How could I admire their color reproductions, I who never loved the originals?

However, sometimes, "failures" appealed to me, those portraits that managed to stand out from the others. I bought the rejects. At least these lovers of the real were that, *for lack of anything better: Forgive them, for they know not what they do!*

But the others, self-styled lovers of the Ideal, maintained that they purposely distorted the characteristics of the *heroine* (and of course they bragged about it!)—Put on some makeup, apply a false nose—scrape away, the grimace reappears, the woman is always underneath!—Other men pretended to create from scratch or at least reproduce that other, spontaneous life, which rises and stirs behind shut eyelids. And, proud of their revolt, they were content to piece together, without any discernment, what they found scattered in nature, or at their colleagues': stencil copies. Such works, ah! if only a god would deign to sort them out!

Believing themselves all destroyers, builders, misunderstood, *damned*, parricides, incendiaries—how they frighten each other! before what they call Glory, wise, submissive, defeated children!—how they lack boldness! . . . They believe in the Immortality of Genius (the biggest joke of all!). Some of them even think *that it has happened*, others *that it will happen*.

Perhaps it's the pain of saying it. Obviously I hardly love them. The thing was, I wished too much to love them.

My deception began in the theater, one day when they brought, on a silver plate, a head of painted cardboard, dripping with red—looking like a

piece of pork from the butcher's.—Disgusting! My religion forbids my even looking at it.

However, before renouncing the world, I will dance before Herod, because he's interested in my sleep and made me describe my dreams to him. . . .

(They say that I turn round and round, now on my palms, now on my toes, like an acrobat—because they don't know how to see: I am a siren, a serpent, standing erect on my tail; I am a bird, an angel, dancing lightly on the hardened tip of my wings.)

. . . Besides, he promised to pay me royally. I want to make a final test: to know what his ideas are on the subject of painted cardboard (because if he has any taste, it is not the question of money that will stop him).

Once, I, erotic sleepwalker, have shed my skin seven times for his pleasure, I will demand that they bring to me on a silver plate the head of the prophet Whatshisname (I forget his name; it's not important! my stepfather understands). At first, it will be funny to see his angry face. He doesn't like me to speak about the prisoner, of whom he is jealous, because that one prophesies at the drop of a hat. He brags about hearing voices—terrible voices. But Salome also fears him, and it is my mother whom he . . .

Why did I ask for that? It's even uglier, more mangled and badly made than in the theater. *It seemed* as though I could touch it, take it in my hands, kiss it . . . It's no big deal! How can an object so ridiculous frighten us? My repulsion is completely esthetic.—Touch it? yes, they always want that: admire it since it's so realistic!—But to kiss it? why? . . . Ah! . . . Yes! They imagine I'm in love with it. *My God! if it amuses them.* I did not know they had so much imagination.—Kiss it? Do they want me to do more? . . . (The Tetrarch has his crisis of nerves. What makes him hear voices? He also *believes that it has happened!*)

Look! it's soiling me with its sticky blood, less red and hotter than usual . . . blood like mine . . .

*(It is not good theater.)*

What does that prove? Simply that I was right:

Art, life: it's the same either way. It is what will be furthest from the dream—even from the nightmare. I really hope there are fools on whom it makes a big impression. Me, it leaves me cold.

If I vibrate with vibrations other than yours, must you conclude that my flesh is insensitive?

**BEAUTY (OR THE TASTE FOR THE BEAST)**

*Although this prince deserved all her attention, she  
could not refrain from asking where the Beast was.*

**MME LEPRINCE DE BEAUMONT**

to the Minotaur

—“You lied to me, Beast: you’re not a monster. It already took so much out of me to get used to your ugliness that I used up all my power to love. I am too weary. No, I would not take again, even in the opposite direction, the same road—if it were to return. I do not renounce my life. I have always been frank with you, whereas you have *deceived me about your merchandise*. In short, I withdraw my hand. The fairies are my witness, it is not to you that I made my promise.

“He wanders away from my sight with those perfect hips—which horrify me. He goes toward other hearts that make you loved in the end for yourself. When one has tasted the Beast—ah! how very insipid is man! I dedicated myself to your dead rings, to the slime of the reptile.

“But before leaving, give me, I beg of you, the address of another monster—an authentic monster.”

**THE ESSENTIAL WIFE**  
or the the Unknown Princess

*She whom I would take would want me to live  
In her way, not in mine . . .*

**J. DE LA FONTAINE**

for R. M.

There was at that time a man who had as many lives as a good Russian whip has straps. He needed a name for each of his lives. He hoarded them, so that not enough names remained for other lives . . .

Refusing to solve it with homonyms—*That's too common!*—the reigning Queen gave up having her daughter baptized. It was understood from this carelessness that the young Princess was destined for a glory without limit, for these are words that restrict the sense of human destinies.

—Whether the Misanthrope be Alceste or Philinte doesn't matter! We need an example, a label under which to line up as many objects as it could contain, all those that won't be too recalcitrant. The vaguer, more malleable (unnameable) the head of a category is, the better it is for the sheep. I know that only a concern for precision about their useless and even inexplicable details prevents retaining this usage.—Suppress their scruples, their names, and you make them famous: They become even more representative.

The Monopolist of Names is no longer named by anyone. Memory rebels against such ambition, while our modest Princess is very well known, since she wed the intelligent Riquet à la Houppe, and by necessity took on the name of her husband.

*They were very happy*, with a goodness without egotism, because *they had many children* who would unite the ugliness of the father with the incorrigible beastliness of the mother.

One can believe that this couple, like so many others, right off endured little quarrels. The Fairies could do nothing: They favor only love. The couple had chosen each other out of self-interest: hoping to divert Their gift—something the Fairies are too powerful to allow.

Deformed and fine, beauty and beast, completing each other, they're recklessly mismatched, it's obvious. But habit arranges things quite well:

Who has not seen in old couples an artificial resemblance, sometimes so marked that one would think them brother and sister, so much had each sacrificed itself for the other! Thus it was with these two. And by some agreed-upon leniency, Riquet ceased making witticisms that irritated his Lady; she abandoned all coquetry and even often appeared badly groomed, so much did she fear exciting the jealousy of her Lord and Master.

One day when they invited some people to dinner, before the company arrived, rediscovering the classical gesture (made eternally new by Delilah), inspired ingenue, Beauty cut Riquet's tassel.—It seemed much less funny than intended. It was the first step toward a realignment. The husband, more and more the follower, did not delay in losing what little remained of his spirit.

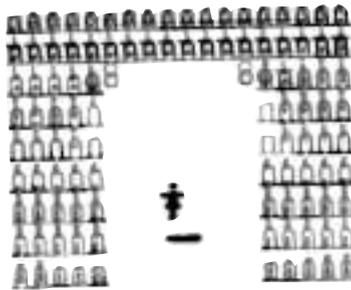
She retained her beauty much longer. The privilege of the weak: A true female is always the strongest.

If she had been contemplating her hatred and her destiny too attentively, she quickly ran to her mirror, which, sometimes ruined by a grimace, only half-way reassured her. Henceforth she avoided looking at the Prince . . .

When he died first, she was still a *fine specimen*, who even passed on into proverb.

A century was right about her.

And the entire Race of women, recognizing themselves in this dead sister, consecrated the flat stone of a symbolically empty tomb and solemn feasts in memory of the Unknown Heroine.\*



\*See figure 2.1 for the male equivalent. *Ed.*

**SOPHIE THE SYMBOLIST**

*She lifted quite gently a little corner of her handkerchief, and lightly squeezed between her fingers the bee with the handkerchief, to prevent it from flying away, and pulled from her pocket her little knife. "I'll cut off his head," said she, "to punish him for all the stings he's stung." Indeed, Sophie placed the bee on the earth, all the time holding it with her handkerchief, and with a tap of the knife she cut off its head, then, because she found that this was very entertaining, she continued cutting it into tiny pieces.*

.....  
*Then he discovered a very clever ploy: he balanced himself on his chair, and leaned so far back that he fell. Sophie rushed over to help him get up. "Did you hurt yourself, Paul?" she asked him.*

PAUL

*No. Quite the opposite.*

**MME LA COMTESSE DE SÉGUR,  
née ROSTOPCHINE**

Idea engenders being—and love precedes the organs that will later make it manifest. So, before the beast has its wings, it must find the equivalents of flight.

Her first doll was for Sophie both the first pleasure and first sorrow of love, both the deflowerer and the eldest child.

As soon as she took it from the trunk and put it in the daylight, it came alive—yes, fragile, delightful, and ready to break.

To make an object dead, to destroy it, is to prove that it had really lived. Sophie understood that quite well.

*While she was dressing it she found it too pale . . .*

SOPHIE

*I want to warm up my doll, Mama, she's very cold.*

THE MOTHER

*Be careful, you'll melt her.*

SOPHIE

*Oh! no, Mama, there's no danger of that.* (Does the sun hurt me? all the more reason it won't hurt her, who is much *tougher!*)

And Sophie finds her mother quite ridiculous.

The disobedient child of three was precocious only in this respect: she trusted in her own reason earlier than normal.

She had the scientific spirit.—The most attentive pigeon can give to its little ones grain by the beakful, and not as an experiment. This was for Sophie the opportunity to assist in a most exciting surgical operation—one that will be an example to her, let there be no doubt about that.

To dissect the little fishes that slip along your hands, is stranger, certainly: they're red and they move—but it's not any more dangerous since they don't cry out.

Do they perhaps suffer? A child has only a vague awareness of pain. Its spirit, always moving toward the New, full of confidence or anguish but always attentive, withdraws, rarely recalling painful sensations—always less and less numerous. They would be chains too heavy to bear.

She wanted it, Sophie can be cruel. Doubtless, she believes that the fishes suffer with the same flesh as her doll, which is dead and which also suffered. She knows the word; she does not know the meaning. She is even more intrigued by it, and will repeat the attempt in vain, without tiring, on herself, and on those she finds within reach—patient with her newborn passions.

She loves, and makes bleed only what she loves: the black chicken, the squirrel, the donkey, and her cousin Paul.

We should note in her work an admirable progression.

At first she looks for a beautiful object that might be valuable to her, and that she could torment in peace (the wax doll); soon, she delights in the risk; to better possess the property of others, in something that bustles around and defends itself a little (the red fishes); she wishes now that there had been a struggle, that the pony and the bee had wounded her in their turn; then the blood, this time, the blood of the marvelous animal, so long desired, truly great, truly terrible, which kicks, which brays, which struggles under her heels armed with pins—*with spurs!*—to feel the flanks shudder between her exhausted thighs (this would be the donkey); then the blood again, human blood—and someone who suffers consciously, willingly, *for her love!* (her cousin Paul, her innocent accomplice).

When she is twenty Sophie encounters Paul again—no longer the little boy who charmed her, not so long ago caressing, not so long ago blaming her and helping her with her *ideas*, but a man who saw, in their *ordeals*, which were so sweet, only a banal desire for marriage. You can well imagine her indifference!

PAUL

You're no longer interested in me?

SOPHIE

Even before we were five, we had exhausted all the games of love; when one began with the symbol, one had little taste for the thing itself.

**SALMACIS THE SUFFRAGETTE**

*. . . Yet from them something like as fire is shed  
That shall not be assuaged till death be dead,  
Though neither life nor sleep can find out this.*

*SWINBURNE*

to Claude

—*Cursed be those through whom scandal comes! but it is necessary that scandal come . . .*

Thus spake Zeus, when he had the adventure of Salmacis.

Up to then, men and women, fauns and nymphs, and even gods and goddesses, met, not joyfully and without ulterior motives, but instead to prepare for future happiness. At the edge of a harvested furrow, they were already sowing for the next season. If some grain lost its way, distracted by a perverse Zephyr, it was at least without premeditation, and almost without their knowing.

Fountain, they tell us, but more like a young torrent, wild in her will to order, impatient with her floods followed by droughts, Salmacis was the first woman to willingly make herself sterile. With slow preliminary caresses, she disarmed the son of Hermes and Aphrodite, and to make even more sure, she had her ovaries taken out.

They will not love each other any the less; but the ulterior motive, the common concern to perpetuate the species, whatever you think of that (noble or shameful—or vain, since it is imperishable), disappeared from their hearts.

Besieged on all sides, they shut themselves away and lived in the present as in the center of a citadel.

They're inseparable, and Love, which is blind, ends by merging them. Thus their fondest desire is realized: instead of three, they are one.

And the double flower of their body, sterile as rare flowers, unknown in the Park, escaped the shears and became immortal . . .

But Love, not understanding that its work is done, takes the monster as a target, makes it bristle with new desires:

Eternally unsatisfied, this strange, shameless couple assaults female and male, attracted, repelled, passive, active, across thirsts and disgusts, with horrid rifts—and jealous of itself.

Accursed lovers, the ridiculous search for their relief disgraces Olympus . . .

Out of decency, a family council accords them this disguise for their crime: Their shameless body will be destroyed (only the legend and image will be preserved, as a memory, as a phantom); their abominably variegated soul will be separated again, and the pieces thrown to the winds. On this condition, however: The spirit of Salmacis, hidden as well as possible, must

inhabit the body of a man; while that of Hermaphrodite must dwell only within the body of a woman!

Their punishment will be to submit, not daring to rebel, not daring to reveal themselves, to the unnatural desires that their presence will engender . . . or to make those males and females who want their hearts to be simple and true flee at the sight of them.

But what will happen if the banished meet again in their exile?—More often than not, Giton and Sappho get on rather badly. At best: a complicity of the most chaste. Everything happens in words.—The pleasures of gossip. (This is a common trait of theirs.) Their souls understand each other, surely! they could sympathize, become one, even—oh! platonically (Diotima with Socrates, but Alcibiades is in the wings)—the bodies are there, opposed without relief, without remedy contrary to the mutual desire of the lovers, of the cursed lovers, unpaired, with whom it is impossible to match one being in all the world.

(If Juno took the form of a bull, Europa would not have been tricked.)—When Hermaphrodite meets Hermaphrodite, it will truly find the body, this time, not at all the soul that it desires.—Bad *brothers*, false brothers!—Laughable combats of cocks without cockscombs or spurs; combats to the death, however . . . Their *sisters* are no wiser: Giton and Ganymede cannot stand one another.—Slashing claws, biting teeth, hair-pulling fights without hairdos: How Salmacis above all shuns Salmacis!

There is only one relief in the fate of Hermaphrodite, and by which he can still ridicule the gods: One body in tune with one soul is enough to make love.

Hermaphrodite can visit the house of Narcissus—and introduce himself there on my behalf.



**THE ONE WHO IS NOT A HERO**

*I was incapable of appreciating it—and of course  
that's understandable: passionate, nearly hysterical, unwor-  
thy . . . and completely without envy, absolutely hating all  
the serenity of this world!*

**THE ANDROGYNE**

for C. de R.

In the melee of tortured bodies, arms stretched and twisted, imploring hands; in the melee of limbs, legs where a spasm flashes, near the inert heads, dull eyes, heavy lips; in the melee of dry mouths, the confusion of tongues and moans—upright, the Man passed, his face pure, his walk serene, upright, black, attentive, amid the expanse—the rattles and the surges—of naked bodies embracing.

He is sober and the others are drunk. And I? His coming sobers me up while aggravating my thirst.

Here, among the laughter and the sobbing, his smile, his calmness, his affable air, his clothes—skins from another world—cause scandal—(on that we all agree)—bringing a dissonance that up to then was missing from the feast.

Our host breaks away and greets him. Then the Man undresses.—Like us? No, not at all like us. He does not have to hide his embarrassment beneath the irritation of gestures. A gracefulness, animal and free, issues from his body—but it is of an animal so tamed by its soul that it swears allegiance only to instinct. (Like those that bring back a prey without drinking its blood, or shun the rutting dog when the Master calls.)—A terrible harmony, nobility, and simplicity for us, who cannot lay claim to it.

For us? I perceive that I am alone in sensing his malaise. Once the others were reassured that he slept in their ranks, they resumed with him their passionate occupations.

Respite for me! I look at them: Do they not believe themselves sacred Greeks and Pagans, these little Christians in revolt? Hellenistic without knowing it, the Man, who never rebels (*I hate movement displacing the lines*), smiles with the infinite smile of their lives in stone: To conquer Athens, he does not need a black mass.

Statue indifferent to their games, but happy, and full of kindnesses for all, it lends itself, it does not give itself. They themselves, without doubting it, were they not changed by it? Incapable of imitating such a natural thing in their debauchery—their gestures, exalted not long ago, collapse again, become libertine—they are afraid to seem excessive . . .

The Man looks and is amused . . . (the very idea of introducing moderation into an orgy!) And, less indulgent than he, I surprise myself by hating them!

What about it? Did I not belong to them? No, but I took them all on: This bite, I recognize in it the mark of my teeth; these bruises, my fists made them blue; under my imperious fingers, who didn't ask for mercy?

However, I remained a virgin, miraculously—or rather through the disdain that must be felt for a banal act—and because then I did not know subjective desire.

Do I know it now? No; because my first movement is to lean on the Man, on this godlike man, lean on him to see if it is still possible to increase his pride.—A slave moreover, and not even beautiful!—How could she? . . . No matter, she will do her best.

Humiliated! that's what's happened—I've been humiliated. A voice that has not changed, or weakened, that has not hesitated, that has not even lied—oh! without dreaming of hiding his pleasure (a pleasure too small to be worth so much shame), behold how he thanks me, according my hate a spasm of politeness . . .

Someone else has already seized the cadaver. It's the rules of the game. It's better: just let it be.

But (struggle short and courteous) he frees himself from the embrace; brutally—in a clinch—I throw myself on him. . . . What then was he feeling? no, I didn't cry, I didn't shudder. But harsh anguished words violated my soul irremediably: "My dear, did I hurt you?"

It is suddenly the perfect isolation in promiscuity—where so many beings however are dear to both of us—we who hardly know ourselves. One actual thing only matters to the Man: I suffered; he wishes to be responsible for it.

Would pity then be the most intense emotion for this sort of god? Pity, no. But for the strong, the full use of his strength in the crushing, and then in the protecting, of the weak.

Epilogue

—It is so unexpected, though vile, the integrity of your *foolish virgin* who touched him.

—Oh! that nonsense! Don't believe that: a minor detail, without any value to this man, I assure you; he didn't even notice it. I will gladly affirm that my foolishness was no longer virginal; it was simpler—and more plausible! But how was the Man, who is not clumsy, wounded needlessly? Now understand this: Pain too, pain itself, is extremely indifferent. That which touched him—and that alone—was the cause. It is against himself, and not for this woman that he is suddenly inflamed . . . Attached as he is to his own perfection, his only weakness, the only sensitive point in his heart.

—You present the facts, as usual, in their most unpleasant aspect. However, you did not lie when you said that he, whom you call the Man, is awfully nice, and the story, despite the decor of the orgy, consoling after so many monstrous acts.

—Doubtless. For it is not true, nor even possible. It is only the imaginings of a hysterical woman.

—Impossible? And why?

—First, because, a liar as are all heroines, this monster among monsters would not know how to be a virgin.

—Bah! we all started out as virgins.

—I admit it. *She* would not admit it. She was already caressing herself, she had already known herself, deflowered, at her mother's breast.



# CLAUDE CAHUN

## Plate 1

Claude Cahun

*Self-Portrait*, 1917

black-and-white photograph

Jersey Museums Service



**Plate 2**

Claude Cahun

*Self-Portrait*, c. 1921

modern black-and-white photograph from original negative  
Jersey Museums Service





**Plate 3**  
Claude Cahun  
*Self-Portrait*, c. 1927  
black-and-white photograph  
Jersey Museums Service

**Plate 4**  
Claude Cahun  
*Self-Portrait*, 1927  
black-and-white photograph  
Jersey Museums Service



**Plate 5**  
Claude Cahun  
*Self-Portrait*, c. 1928  
black-and-white photograph  
Jersey Museums Service

**Plate 6**  
Claude Cahun  
*Self-Portrait*, 1932  
black-and-white photograph  
Jersey Museums Service





**Plate 7**  
Claude Cahun  
*Self-Portrait*, c. 1928  
black-and-white photograph  
Jersey Museums Service



**Plate 8**  
Claude Cahun  
*Self-Portrait*, c. 1929  
black-and-white photograph  
Jersey Museums Service

**Plate 9**

Claude Cahun

*Self-Portrait*, c. 1920

black-and-white photograph

Jersey Museums Service





**Plate 10 (top)**  
Claude Cahun  
*Self-Portrait covered with masks*, c. 1928  
black-and-white photograph  
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes



**Plate 11 (bottom)**  
Claude Cahun  
*Self-Portrait*, c. 1927  
black-and-white photograph  
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes

**Plate 12**

Claude Cahun

*Self-Portrait*, c. 1925

black-and-white photograph

Collection Leslie Tonkonow and Klaus Ottmann



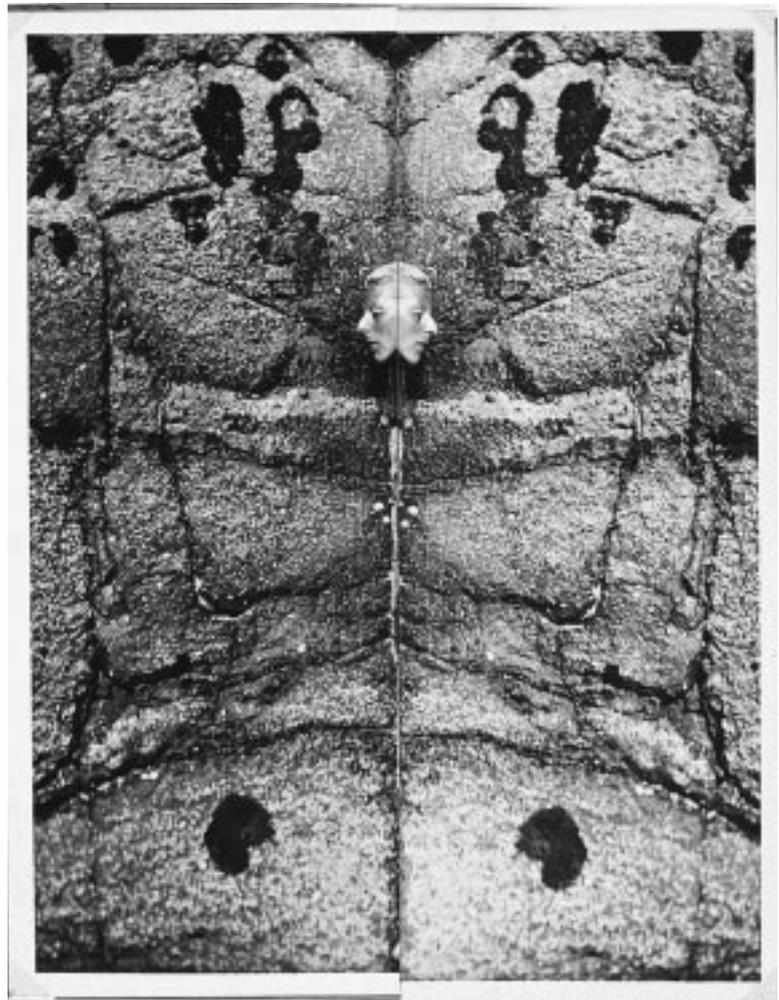




**Plate 13** (*opposite*)  
Claude Cahun (with Marcel Moore)  
photomontage, 1929–1930, frontispiece for chapter 2  
“Moi-Même,” in *Aveux non avenues*  
Private Collection, New York

**Plate 14** (*left*)  
Claude Cahun (with Marcel Moore)  
photomontage, 1929–1930, frontispiece for chapter 7  
“H.U.M.,” in *Aveux non avenues*  
Private Collection, New York

**Plate 15** (*below*)  
Claude Cahun  
*Self-Portrait*, c. 1928  
black-and-white photograph  
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes





**Plate 16**  
Claude Cahun  
*Self-Portrait*, 1930  
black-and-white photograph  
Jersey Museums Service

**Plate 17**

Claude Cahun

*Self-Portrait*, c. 1947

black-and-white photograph

Jersey Museums Service





**Plate 18**  
Claude Cahun  
*Self-Portrait*, c. 1939  
black-and-white photograph  
Jersey Museums Service

**Plate 19**

Claude Cahun

*Self-Portrait*, c. 1937

black-and-white photograph

Jersey Museums Service





**Plate 20**  
Claude Cahun  
*Self-Portrait*, c. 1948  
black-and-white photograph  
Jersey Museums Service



## 4

### THE EQUIVOCAL “I”: CLAUDE CAHUN AS LESBIAN SUBJECT

Abigail Solomon-Godeau

That *Woman* is everywhere to be found in the texts and images produced by the writers and artists who constituted the first generation of French surrealism but women artists rather less so is not surprising. The surrealists' ideals of femininity—sorceress and visionary, *femme-enfant*, incarnation of mysterious beauty, and locus of eroticism: male fantasies all—were formulations that reified Woman at the expense of women, women artists, of course, included. Consequently and with a few notable exceptions (e.g., Meret Oppenheim), women in surrealism were far more acknowledged in their roles as lovers and muses, or, in the case of those such as the anarchist Germaine Berton or the parricide Violette Nozières, celebrated as surrealist heroines—mascots, as it were, in the combat against bourgeois society and its mores. As Whitney Chadwick observed in her important study of 1985, “Surrealism’s idealized vision of woman was like an albatross around the neck of the woman artist, difficult to ignore but of no help in forging a personal identity.”<sup>1</sup>

But while no women artists were included in the official ranks of the movement, as Chadwick also demonstrated, many women artists were actively encouraged in their work by André Breton and other members of the surrealist group, and women artists were also regularly included in the group’s exhibitions. Most of these, however (and again, Oppenheim is exceptional), were painters, although Lee Miller and Dora Maar made photographs, and Valentine Hugo and Nusch Eluard made photocollages. But as recently as 1985, when Chadwick’s book appeared, the work of Claude Cahun (1894–1954) was still largely unknown.<sup>2</sup> Aside from her polemical 1934 pamphlet *Les Paris sont*

*ouverts*, the photographic work as well as most of her writing, published and unpublished, remained outside the ever more intensively studied surrealist movement until a French scholar, François Leperlier, published in 1992 the first—and to this day the only—critical monograph, as well as a catalogue raisonné.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the women surrealists discussed by Chadwick, and closer to the spirit of surrealism in the 1920s, Cahun's artistic work was in media *other* than painting and included photography, photcollage, object-making, and theatrical set design. Briefly, Cahun also performed as an actor in the short-lived, symbolist-influenced, experimental theater of Pierre Albert-Birot. Her extant writing includes journalistic essays, prose poems, and experimental literary forms such as the book *Aveux non avenues* and the unpublished "Heroines," but since her rediscovery, it has been primarily her astonishing pictures that have made her the object of critical attention, particularly on the part of feminist scholars and critics.<sup>4</sup>

The special interest Cahun holds for feminist critics and scholars derives from many features of her life and her work, not least from the fact of her being, as Leperlier notes, "l'une des très rares femmes qui participa activement à ce mouvement dans les années les plus critiques et les plus complexes" (one of the rare women who actively participated in this [surrealist] movement in its most critical and complex years).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, because much of the photographic work that has survived, as well as "confessional" texts such as *Aveux non avenues*, seems concerned with the question of self-representation—an issue crucial to contemporary feminist theory and criticism—her work prompts numerous questions about the tensions between the autobiographical "I," the textual (or visual) "I," and the referential "I."

In this respect, it is now possible to discern—or so it has been argued—the vague outlines of a shared preoccupation among certain women artists of the period (e.g., Leonore Fini, Florence Henri, Frida Kahlo) that might be said to pivot around the question of (feminine) identity and the complexities and difficulties attending its representation. Indeed, Chadwick and other feminist scholars have hazarded the notion that the enterprise of self-representation might well constitute a kind of trope, a shared thematic, in the work of women artists extending from surrealism to the present. A similar perception informs exhibitions such as Chadwick's "Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation." In her suggestive essay, "An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors," which appears in the exhibition catalogue, Chadwick proposes that the exploration of the possibilities for self-representation constituted not only a discrete theme but an identifiable *difference* within the work of women artists in the orbit of surrealism:

In mobilizing the body as a primary signifier of its cultural politics, Surrealism established new parameters within which women artists might begin to explore the complex and ambiguous relationship between the female body and female identity. Women were not among Surrealism's founding "fathers." Although their significance to the movement continues to be debated, they left a collective body of self-portraits and other self-representations that in taking the artist's own body as the



**Figure 4.1** Claude Cahun, *Self-Portrait with Mask*, c. 1928, black-and-white photograph, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes

starting point and in collapsing interior and exterior projections of the self (regardless of how that word was/is understood), continues to reverberate within contemporary practices by women that articulate how the body is marked by femininity as a lived experience, subjectivity produced through new narratives, and the possibility of a feminine imaginary enacted. This body of work appears to have no parallel in the work of male Surrealists more inclined to project their desires outward, locating moments of rupture between conscious and unconscious, subject and object, in bodies Other to theirs, and almost exclusively in an otherness assigned to the feminine.<sup>6</sup>

The issue of self-representation raised by Chadwick in this essay and in other of her texts dealing with women and surrealism is a complicated one, and much depends on how one wishes to define both the terms “self” (as Chadwick herself concedes) and “self-representation.” Nevertheless, and whatever definitions are employed, it would seem to be the case that if any woman artist’s work warrants Chadwick’s characterization, it is that of Cahun. Although much of her work—literary and graphic—was lost or destroyed during the Second World War when her house on the Channel Island Jersey was requisitioned and then pillaged by the occupying Germans, and although new work of hers might yet come to light, what remains bears witness to *some* kind of project of self-representation. Self-portraits figure among the earliest of her photographs (1911) and are a consistent feature in her visual production until

almost the end of her life.<sup>7</sup> In some cases, and in contrast to much surrealist photography, these are what are referred to as “straight” photographs, that is to say neither solarized nor otherwise subjected to darkroom manipulation. Their electrifying, unsettling effects are largely a consequence of Cahun’s particular staging of herself—that, and the Medusa-like ferocity of her face and gaze. Other photographic works in which she features are the photocollages reproduced in her book *Aveux non avenue* (plates 13, 14). In all cases, and contributing to the fascination—the shock—of her work, now that it has been resurrected for postmodern eyes, is Cahun’s preoccupation with the mask, the disguise, the masquerade of a mobile and unstable self (*fig. 4.1*). “Sous ce masque un autre masque. Je n’en finirai pas de soulever tous ces visages.” (“Under this mask, another mask. I will never finish lifting up all these faces.”)<sup>8</sup> Whether Cahun’s project considered overall is better understood in terms of the specific historical circumstances and determinations of French surrealism in the 1920s and 1930s (and the difficult position of women artists within it), whether it should be understood as a singular body of work produced by an altogether singular artist, whether it might be considered in terms of Cahun’s lesbianism as itself constituting a specific enunciative position, or alternatively whether we might justly extrapolate from Cahun’s work something like a recurring thematic in modern (and postmodern) art by women, are by no means simple questions. That said, it is nonetheless undeniable that Cahun’s oeuvre, with its consistent play with the instability of identity, its frequent deployment of masquerade, its penchant for masks and mirrors, is startlingly close to the terms of contemporary feminist thinking about identity, gender, and sexual difference. Consequently, it requires almost more of an effort to resituate Cahun in her actual time and milieu than it does to consider her work in the context of contemporary theoretical formulations about femininity, identity, and representation.

Almost from the beginning—that is, since the appearance of Leperlier’s monograph—Cahun’s photographic production has been aligned with the work of postmodernist feminist artists, most notably Cindy Sherman, primarily because both women photograph themselves. This linkage was first made in Leperlier’s study (“elle semble annoncer la démarche d’un Molinier, d’une Gina Pane, d’un Urs Lüthi, ou plus manifestement encore de Cindy Sherman.” “She seems to prefigure the work of a Molinier, a Gina Pane, an Urs Lüthi, or even more obviously, a Cindy Sherman”),<sup>9</sup> and it has been reiterated in virtually all the subsequent writing on Cahun.

This tendency to “read” Cahun through contemporary theory and the work of contemporary artists is not, in and of itself, inimical to the critical exploration of her work (what work of the past is *not* viewed through the lens of the present?), but as I would argue, we must be as cautious about essentializing the work of women’s self-representation as we are about essentializing the historical actuality of women artists themselves. In other words, before we rush to create feminist (matri)lineages in which Claude Cahun becomes the ancestor of, for example, Francesca Woodman or Cindy Sherman, we need carefully to consider the nature of the terms, determinations, and contexts that formed and informed

Cahun's oeuvre, or, for that matter, Woodman's or Sherman's. Women artists of the twentieth century may well have consistently dealt with the problem of self-representation, but it does not follow from this that Cahun's or Deren's or Sherman's work can or should be collapsed into a "master" category of feminine self-representation even as we acknowledge the omnipresence of certain issues raised by the lives and work of women artists within predominantly male formations.<sup>10</sup>

It is, in any case, undoubtedly significant that certain of the texts that figure so importantly in contemporary feminist theory (not to mention recent writing on Cahun herself), such as Joan Rivière's much-cited "Womanliness as a Masquerade," are contemporaneous with Cahun's own work.<sup>11</sup> In this respect, it is worth remarking that Rivière was able to produce her analysis of femininity as compensatory, defensive, and staged (rather than innate, authentic, or essential) precisely as a consequence of the same social, economic, and cultural determinations that shaped the lives and work of the women artists of the period. It is, for instance, widely believed that it was Rivière herself who furnished the example of the professional woman whose femininity was a function of masquerade. Which is to say that Rivière, like Cahun, was representative of the epochal "new women" of the 1920s, and thus that both were part of the first generation of European and American women to have come of age in a period of relative emancipation. This emancipation had numerous implications and included not just the possibility of professional—including artistic—training, but also the possibility of constructing independent and sexually "free" lives outside of domesticity, maternity, and the family.

Related to the more general emancipation of women (and further contributing to the widespread cultural anxiety that congealed around the "new woman" and all she was imagined to signify) was the increasingly visible emergence in cities such as Berlin, Paris, and London of lesbian subcultures, including circles of intellectually and/or stylistically influential lesbians. Victor Margueritte's sensational, best-selling novel *La Garçonne* (published in Paris by Flammarion in 1922) announces in its very title that the "new woman" is distinguished by her blurring of gender distinctions. More scandalously still, the sexual freedom enjoyed by the eponymous heroine leads her, inexorably, to lesbian adventure, Margueritte thereby confirming the worst fears of his readers. It was, therefore, the discursive contiguity of "new woman" and "lesbian" that inflected both mainstream and popular representation and, to a greater or lesser extent, influenced at least some women's modes of self-representation.

Without, therefore, in any way minimizing the singularity of Cahun's visual or textual productions, it is worth noting that other women artists of the period—for example, Florence Henri—who might also be described as engaged with issues of self-representation, identified themselves, implicitly or explicitly, as new women, even as they more or less boldly declared themselves lesbians. In this respect, the manifest self-fashioning of Claude Cahun (born Lucy Schwob) was likely abetted and sustained by the existence of the remarkable lesbian subculture in Paris of the 1920s, with some of whose most notable mem-

bers—for example, Adrienne Monnier—she had close friendships. Although Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas are certainly the best-known lesbian couple of the period, it is further worth recalling that even as Breton categorically evicted homosexuality from the sexuality surrealism ostensibly celebrated,<sup>12</sup> Paris was then home to Berenice Abbott, Margaret Anderson, Djuna Barnes, Natalie Barney, Sylvia Beach (photographed by Cahun), the Marquise de Belboeuf, Romaine Brooks, Janet Flanner, Jane Heap, Florence Henri, and Solita Solano, as well as Monnier. Certain of these women were cross-dressers (Belboeuf, Brooks, Heap), others were fashionable socialites (Barney and her circle), but all of them could be said to represent different avatars of the “new woman.”<sup>13</sup>

Somewhat curiously, therefore, Cahun’s lesbianism has received far less critical and biographical elaboration than one would expect of the circumstances of her private life as they might inform the nature of her work. Although I would not go so far as to posit a “lesbian specificity” that can be read out of her visual or literary production, by the same token I consider her lesbianism as far more than a biographical anecdote, and I certainly do not consider it as a factor to be subsumed within either the extreme introversion or the narcissism that Cahun herself acknowledged as important facets of her being.<sup>14</sup> That from her twenties until her death in 1954, Cahun lived with and was evidently inseparable from Suzanne Malherbe (“l’autre moi,” as Cahun described her), an artist and illustrator who also adopted a masculine name for her professional and artistic identity (Marcel Moore), is not incidental to Cahun’s production. On the contrary, some of Cahun’s most singular work, such as the ten photollages reproduced in *Aveux non avenues*, were active collaborations between the two women. Unfortunately, the recent scholarly and critical attention devoted to Cahun has not extended to Malherbe and her work as an illustrator, so it is still unclear how their work may have reflected upon each others’. This lacuna is perhaps due to art history and criticism’s implicit bias against collaborative art making, but perhaps also because so little is known about Malherbe herself. Nevertheless, the fact that Malherbe was not merely Cahun’s lifelong lover and companion but her half-sister as well, suggests that the themes of doubling and mirroring, as well as the play with alter egos that feature so prominently in Cahun’s written and photographic work, had some connection to the nature and terms of their unusually close relationship.

This double intimacy, which was evidently established in their childhood, takes on further significance in relation to Cahun’s remarkable photographs of herself, for Malherbe not only made the exposures, she was their first audience, the first spectator to whom—for whom?—Cahun addressed the image and for whose eyes she constructed her pose. It would thus seem appropriate to consider these pictures as consisting in part of an address to the other, rather than considering them solely within the category of self-representation in its more solipsistic sense. This more “transactional” or relational approach to the staging of her photographs is further suggested by the fact that she chose, for the most part, not to exhibit or to reproduce her pictures, although it is clear

that their fabrication required a great deal of preparation, including elaborate costuming, makeup and lighting.<sup>15</sup> It is also evident that by the end of the 1920s Cahun had accumulated a virtual image bank of self-representations that she regularly circulated and recirculated within her own work. Thus, for example, self-portraits made in the 1920s (usually, the head or face alone) feature often in the photocollages produced with Malherbe, ten of which were reproduced in *Aveux non avenues* in 1930.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, insofar as we wish to consider the photographs that Cahun made using herself as subject as instances of self-representation, or as self-portraits, we may well wish to consider whether Cahun "speaks" herself not only as a woman but also as a lesbian. Is there, in other words, a way in which we might wish to consider Cahun's work in terms of *lesbian*, as opposed to women's self-representation?

Supporting such an approach is the additional biographical information that unlike many other women in the surrealist orbit, Cahun appears to have been a feminist, and unlike many feminists, she was clearly conversant and engaged with contemporary discourses about homosexuality. She was, for example, the French translator of Havelock Ellis, who, among other things, theorized homosexuality as a "third sex."<sup>17</sup> In her twenties, she had already written a journalistic account of the Oscar Wilde trial, as well as an unpublished text entitled "Les jeux uraniens." In a few of her photographs, she presents herself relatively unambiguously as a male subject: as a dandified young man with a shaved head, as a young sailor, and somewhat later as a dapperly suited, moustached man. (These photographs are among the few that might possibly be categorized as displaying her in drag.) In this latter incarnation, however, she was *literally* playing a role—the character of Monsieur in Pierre Albert-Birot's *Banlieu*—and it somewhat complicates the possible readings of her pictures when we realize that a number of them depict Cahun in the roles she played in Albert-Birot's theater, Le Plateau.<sup>18</sup> In these instances, what began as a public appearance became in the photographs a far more private affair, shared only with Malherbe and with carefully selected friends.

Where in certain of her pictures Cahun masquerades as a man, others seem closer to the category of the Androgyne. These would include the photographs of her with her head shaved bald as an egg, bearing expressions as disturbingly predatory as they are fierce; others where she sports closely cropped hair, plucked eyebrows, and a lipsticked mouth, and a similarly unsettling gaze; and still others where, for example, as swami or yogi, sexual identity is entirely ambiguous (plate 4). Such photographs, in tandem with her writings on androgyny (as an ideal), or in her texts featuring androgynes as personages (i.e., Salmacis, the mythic origin of the androgyne, is a character in "Heroines"), constitute a category somewhat apart from the "lesbian," and although I am proposing that her lesbianism be considered as one of the shaping elements of her art, it must nonetheless be stated that nowhere in her writing (to my knowledge) does she accept or affirm the *identity* of lesbian.

This refusal of the category "lesbian" is, however, perhaps not so strange as it might seem, for insofar as a lesbian is defined, then as now, as a woman who desires women, the category "fits" only to the extent that the subject iden-



**Figure 4.2** Claude Cahun, variation on Plate III, *Le Coeur de Pic*, 1936, black-and-white photograph, Courtesy Leslie Tonkonow Artworks and Projects



**Figure 4.3** Claude Cahun, *Self-Portrait*, 1932, black-and-white photograph, Jersey Museums Service

tifies herself as a woman. As Monique Wittig has argued, "The refusal to become (or to remain) heterosexual always meant to refuse to become man or woman, conscious or not. For a lesbian, this goes further than the refusal of the *role* 'woman.' It is the refusal of the economic, ideological, and political power of a man."<sup>19</sup>

This refusal is given perhaps its least ambiguous articulation in the manuscript of 1925 that Cahun titled "Heroines," translated and published in full for the first time in this book.<sup>20</sup> In a series of vignettes, all written in the first person, and taking as her cast of characters fifteen feminine archetypes, Cahun deheroicizes—when she does not acidly mock or dismiss—the male protagonists featured in these tales. Thus, Cinderella's prince is a foot fetishist, Ulysses a cuckold, St. John the Baptist becomes "Whatshisname?," someone of no importance, and so forth. But even more significantly, from the very first page Cahun limns the nature as well as some of the various sources of male domination, masculine fears and anxieties included. Eve, for example, remarks that "si seulement Adam me donnait plus d'argent de poche" (if only Adam had given me more pocket money), and Holophernes is described as fearful of sexual contamination: "Après qu'il a baisé son esclave il s'essuie furtivement la lèvre. Il n'ôte point ses vêtements de peur de souiller de son corps plus qu'il n'est indispensable." (After he has kissed his slave, he furtively wipes his lips. He doesn't remove any more of his clothes than necessary in order not to soil his body).<sup>21</sup> Throughout the text too, there are frequent remarks that signal Cahun's wry acknowledgment of gender ideology (e.g., "Une femme qui a des sens est-elle vraiment un monstre?" [Is a woman with sense really a monster?]). And hardly fortuitously, there is the inclusion in her cast of characters of Sappho, Salmacis, and a last, nameless androgyne. Among the object photographs she made in the 1930s (*fig. 4.2*) is one titled "le Père" a small splayed mannequin, made from debris, laid out on the beach, sprouting a stick penis from the navel and under whose legs is a vulvalike mark inscribed in the sand (reproduced also in a later self-portrait, *fig. 4.3*).<sup>22</sup>

As "Heroines" and other works attest, Cahun is an artist for whom sexual politics, as opposed to the sexual *body*, is a domain to consciously, deliberately, indeed intellectually investigate, a far different enterprise than surrealism's celebration of the anarchic and liberating potential of eros and eroticism.

In claiming that "a lesbian is not a woman," Wittig proposes we think of *lesbianism* as entailing an *ontological* refusal of a definitional category. Whether the lesbian defines her "self" in feminine or masculine terms, whether her psychic identifications are with men or women, whether her lived sexuality is characterized by active or passive aims (or neither or both), whether she is "androgyne," "invert," "pervert," "uranian," or third sex, "woman" is what she is not. This categorical refusal might well account for the fact that the majority of Cahun's self-portraits (if we are to consider them as such) do not play with codes of femininity as such (nor, with the exception of those few photographs in which she presents herself *en travestie*, with masculinity), and in the few instances where they do, the feminine is staged in unmistakably and blatantly theatricalized terms. Moreover, Cahun's textual and visual explorations of fem-

inity or womanliness (as in “Heroines” and *Aveux*) deemphasize the body, particularly the eroticized feminine body so ubiquitous in surrealist art in general.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, and again in contrast to surrealist photographic practice, in the photocollages that were made to accompany *Aveux non avenues*, it is Cahun’s face and head that are most frequently represented. Even among the earliest of her self-portraits, the emphasis is usually put on her face and head, with the central focus placed on her daunting and riveting gaze. Furthermore, the costumes she designed and wears in other photographs are more unisex than anything else, and where some small details of the costume allude to the morphological, such as those that include “nipples” (plate 3), they too are unisex. Altogether, Cahun’s photographs minimize or efface the body as body, abstracting or otherwise dematerializing it, even in those in which she wears only a bathing costume, or possibly nothing.

In what ways, then, might we be able to extrapolate some notion of a lesbian subjectivity informing these photographs and photocollages? One way to approach this question is with reference to definitions contemporary to Cahun’s work. Inasmuch as it is clear that Cahun’s preferred definitions were derived from Karl Ulrichs and Havelock Ellis, lesbianism as such would not seem to be the salient term. But implicit in her embrace of definitions that discursively produced homosexuality as a positivity in itself (i.e., “uranian” or “third sex”) is a concomitant rejection of notions of female homosexuality as either deviant or imitative. This is important because lesbianism was early on defined by Freud as more or less contingent upon a “masculinity complex,” and popular discourses on lesbianism tended also to imagine the lesbian as a masculinized subject. But although there were those who were wont to consider male homosexuality as constituted by a feminine subjectivity trapped in a man’s body, this does not necessarily mean that Cahun considered herself to harbor a masculine subjectivity trapped in her own.

If, for Wittig, a lesbian is not a woman, in Freudian theory, masculinity and femininity are not only relational but relative terms, more in the nature of cultural ideals than perfectly realizable identities. Lacan goes even further to the extent that he considers the heterosexual roles designated as “man” and “woman” as themselves part of the symbolic order (and thus a social production), an ideal embodiment of the law of sexual difference. Moreover, and as Judith Butler remarks, “These symbolic positions for Lacan are by definition impossible to occupy even as they are impossible to resist as the structuring telos of desire.”<sup>24</sup> Lacan, in fact, extended Rivière’s formulation of masquerade to encompass masculinity as well: “One might even say that the masculine ideal and the feminine ideal are represented in the psyche by something other than this activity/passivity opposition. Strictly speaking, they spring from a term that I have not introduced but which one female psychoanalyst has pinpointed as the feminine sexual attitude—the term masquerade.”<sup>25</sup>

This notion of gender as masquerade, like Judith Butler’s conception of gender as fundamentally performative, resonates strikingly with Cahun’s work not merely because of the recurring appearance of costumes and masks—the self as an affair of smoke and mirrors—but because it appears to enact the most

radical part of Rivière's argument. Womanliness, in Rivière's account, did not mask something beneath it (say, the pre-Oedipal, polymorphously perverse, lost continent of primal femininity) but was itself a vacancy, an emptiness. Certainly there are works of Cahun's that could function as virtual illustrations of such a model. Among a series of four photographs made in 1928, for example, all employing a feminine mask with a fringe of bangs, there is one in which both mask and "body" are manifestly empty. Works such as these echo the question posed by Judith Butler as to whether in effect there *is* anything by way of a "contents" to the self: "First, what is meant by understanding gender as an impersonation? Does this mean that one puts on a mask or persona, that there is a 'one' who precedes that 'putting on,' who is something other than its gender from the start? Or does this miming, this impersonating precede and form the 'one,' operating as its formative precondition rather than its dispensable artifice?"<sup>26</sup>

But if we are to take Cahun's work as an exemplary demonstration of the fictitious nature of the "self," if we are to read her pictures as primarily an exploration of the agency of masquerade in constituting a simulacrum of a "self," and the self as isomorphic with the terms of its representation, how and in what terms do we account for her lifelong preoccupation with issues of identity at all? Furthermore, while the notion of masquerade may account for the aporias, if not the *fraudulence* of gender performance as such, it does not in and of itself "account" for lesbianism, for sexual orientation (as we would now say) has only an adventitious relationship to gender, masculine or feminine. Or, as Butler observes: "There are no direct expressive or causal lines between sex, gender, gender presentation, sexual practice, fantasy and sexuality. None of these terms captures or determines the rest. Part of what constitutes sexuality is precisely that which does not appear and that which, to some degree, can never appear."<sup>27</sup> It is perhaps in this matrix of contradiction—Cahun's consistent explorations of an identity *non avenu*—that we might wish to reconsider some of the implications of Cahun's lesbianism, particularly with respect to Butler's deconstructive approach to lesbian identity.

Taking as her point of departure the conception of lesbianism as a "derivative" of heterosexuality, a "bad copy" of a sexual norm, "a vain effort to participate in the phantasmatic plenitude of naturalized heterosexuality which will always and only fail,"<sup>28</sup> Butler argues instead for a form of primary mimeticism constitutive of *all* sexuality. Taking drag as an instance of a copy that reveals the absence of an original, and referring to Esther Newton's work, Butler frames the issue thus:

Drag is not the putting on of a gender that belongs properly to some other group, i.e. an act of *expropriation* or *appropriation* that assumes the gender is a rightful property of sex, that "masculine" belongs to "male" and "feminine" belongs to "female." There is no "proper" gender, a gender proper to one's sex rather than another, which is in some sense that sex's cultural property. Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. If this is



**Figure 4.4** Claude Cahun, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1911, black-and-white photograph, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes

true, it seems, there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates, but *gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original*; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an *effect* and a consequence of the imitation itself. [Italics in the original].<sup>29</sup>

The interest of Butler's formulations for a reading of Cahun's self-portraits resides in the way they complement Cahun's frequent use of quotational modes of address and self-presentation. In one of her earliest self-portraits, which Leperlier dates 1911, Cahun stages herself as the virtual double of the famously beautiful (and widely photographed) courtesan Cléo de Merode (*fig. 4.4*). Eight years later, in one of her most haunting photographs, she is the very reincarnation of her father, the writer and publisher Maurice Schwob (plate 9). That Leperlier gives the date of the photograph of Maurice Schwob as 1920—that is, a year later than Cahun's photograph, is appropriately uncanny. Be that as it may, there would seem to be operative in Cahun's works a dialectical play between mimetic and identificatory impulses, manifest, on the one hand, by the perpetual mimetic staging of herself as an "Other," and on the other hand, by her affirming, in various ways, her affiliation with her uncle, the symbolist writer Marcel Schwob, with surrealism as a project, with Malherbe as an alter ego, with her intimate friend Henri Michaux (who appears in certain of the photocollages [plate 14] in *Aveux non avenues*), and so

forth. Accordingly, the play of imitation no less than the play of identification may in some ways be facilitated, if not fostered, by a lesbian (i.e., "not woman") enunciative position, no matter how provisional, which might furnish the ground *from which* Cahun "makes strange"—to use an expression popular among Russian artists in the aftermath of the Revolution—the appearances of gender identity as such.

What "performs" does not exhaust the "I"; it does not lay out in visible terms the comprehensive content of that "I," for if the performance is "repeated," there is always the question of what differentiates from each other the moments of identity that are repeated. And if the "I" is the effect of a certain repetition, one which produces the semblance of a continuity or coherence, then there is no "I" that precedes the gender that it is said to perform; the repetition, and the failure to repeat, produce a string of performances that constitute and contest the coherence of that "I."<sup>30</sup>

"What performs does not exhaust the 'I.'" In suggesting that we ought not to disqualify Cahun's sexual orientation from playing a part in her work (as it obviously did in her life), I do not pretend to have answered the question "What is a lesbian?," or "Is there a lesbian specificity discernable in cultural production?" or even, *pace*, Wittig, "Are lesbians women?" These are very much the questions that Cahun's entire oeuvre raises, and they open out to the even larger issue of how to evaluate the relations between a life and its art. But in celebrating Cahun for in effect having so presciently prefigured feminist art of the 1970s and later, much is being precluded from discussion. In other words, there is a tendency to see Cahun first as a postmodernist feminist *avant la lettre*, but to see less well those other, different elements of her life and work that were no less determining of both. These include her material privilege (she did not have to earn her living); her famous family and the connections it enabled (no other young women, needless to say, were published in the *Mercur de France*); her politics (briefly communist, then Trotskyite, then unaffiliated but leftist); her coming of age in the 1920s; and of course her personal responsiveness first to symbolism and then to surrealism itself, which provided so many of the elements of her own idiosyncratic production. Lesbianism, as I have argued (and however crude a designation that might be to describe what Cahun "was"), is thus only one of these multiple determinations, but as such, it should neither be discounted much less banished from discussion.

## NOTES

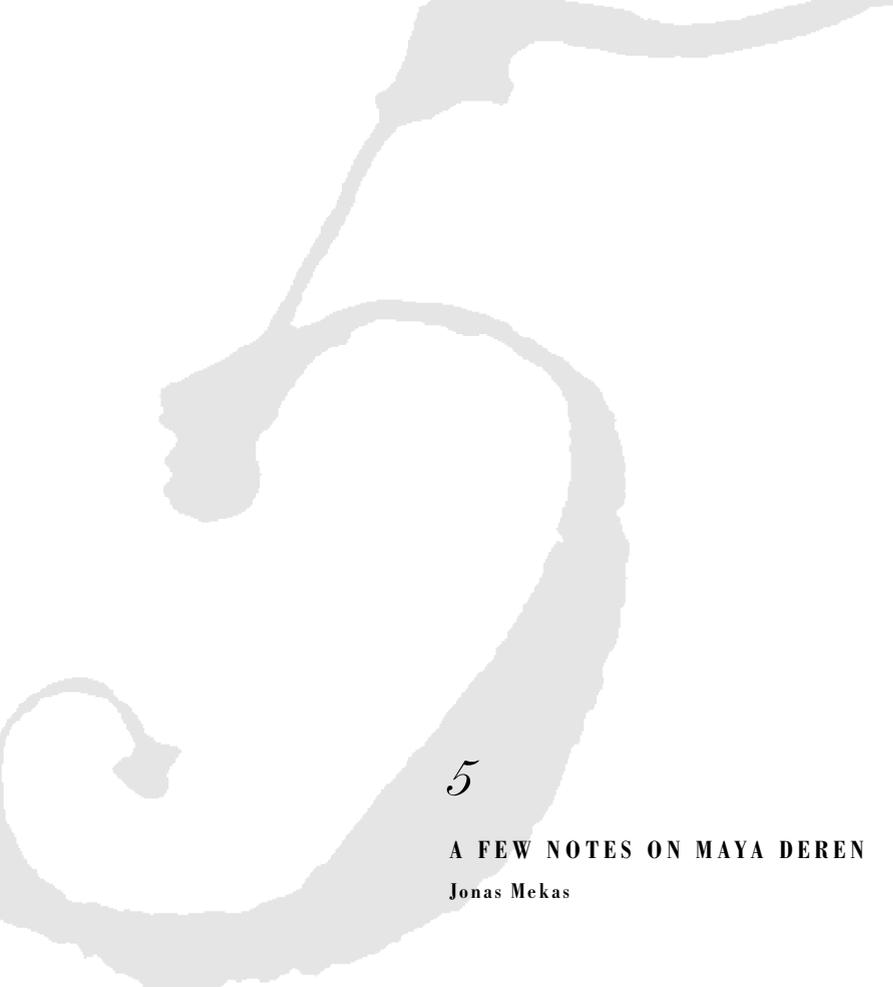
1. Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 66.
2. Two photographs of Cahun were included in the 1985 exhibition, "L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism," Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., the first exhibition devoted exclusively to surrealist photography. But as is evident, little was then

known about Cahun and even less about the range and extent of her work. See Dawn Ades, Rosalind Krauss, and Jane Livingston, *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985) and especially the essays of Rosalind Krauss, which went far to reposition photography as *the* exemplary form of surrealist artistic practice.

3. François Leperlier, *Claude Cahun: L'écrit et la métamorphose* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1992). All biographical information in my essay is taken from Leperlier's book, which has not been translated into English. The catalogue raisonné, which reproduces in small format the nearly 300 photographs by Cahun now known, and which was also the work of Leperlier, appears at the end of the exhibition catalogue, *Claude Cahun: Photographe* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and Jean-Michel Place, 1995).
4. This is not so much the case with Leperlier's monographic study, which puts much greater emphasis on Cahun's literary production and also thoroughly contextualizes it in relation to Cahun's influences and contemporaries. With respect to Cahun's photography, and in addition to Leperlier's book, the principal discussions in English include David Bate, "The Mise en Scène of Desire" in *Mise en Scène*, ex. cat. (London: ICA, 1994); Katy Kline, "In or Out of the Picture" Claude Cahun and Cindy Sherman," in *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-Representation*, ed. Whitney Chadwick (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 66–81; Therese Lichtenstein, "A Mutable Mirror: Claude Cahun," *Artforum*, 30, no. 8 (April 1992); Laurie Monahan, "Radical Transformations: Claude Cahun and the Masquerade of Womanliness," in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine*, ed. M. Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 125–133; and Honor Lasalle and Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Surrealist Confessions: Claude Cahun's Photomontages," *Afterimage* 19 (March 1992), 10–13.
5. Leperlier, *Claude Cahun*, 13. Unless otherwise noted, translations are by the author.
6. Whitney Chadwick, "An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation," in Chadwick, *Mirror Images*, 4.
7. Limitations of language being what they are, I have little recourse but to refer to Cahun's pictures as "self-portraits" or, more awkwardly, "self-representations." Insofar as one of my arguments in this essay concerns the nonequivalence of a "self-portrait" and a "self," this is a problem, but to frame these terms each time I use them with quotation marks seems not a particularly good solution either.
8. Fifth plate of *Aveux non avenues* (Paris: Editions du Carrefour, 1930).
9. Leperlier, *Claude Cahun*, 229.
10. See in this regard the anthology *Surrealism and Women*, eds. Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli, and Gwen Raaberg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993) as well as Chadwick, *Mirror Images*.
11. The psychoanalyst Joan Rivière's "Womanliness as a Masquerade" was originally published in 1929 in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 10 (1929): 303–313.
12. I am referring to the notorious *enquête*, published in Breton's *La Révolution surréaliste*, in which the core group of [male] surrealists natter away on sexuality and eroticism, and in which Breton imperiously rejects [male] homosexuality. *Female* homosexuality is (unsurprisingly) not mentioned. See in this regard Xavière Gauthier, *Surréalisme et Sexualité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).
13. On this subject, see Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900–1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980).
14. My emphasis on Cahun's lesbianism is very much at odds with Leperlier's own psychobiographic interpretation, which, with all due respect to his years of research on Cahun, is very much underwritten by "heterosexual presumption." Leperlier, in fact, goes to some length to "heterosexualize" Cahun, positing, for example (and with little evidence), her unrequited love for André Breton. He presumes, as well, a youthful love affair with a man, based on the first-person narration in *Aveux non avenues*. As should be clear from my essay, and even more clear from the nature of Cahun's work itself, much caution is necessary in taking Cahun's "I" at face value.
15. In her lifetime, and with the exception of the photocollages included in *Aveux non avenues*, she seems to have published only one photograph of herself, bald-headed and technically distorted so that the head becomes a monstrously extended egg shape. This was reproduced in the journal *Bifur* in 1930. Another altered photograph, composed of a double-headed bald Cahun, joined at the shoulders, was reproduced in lithographed form as the cover of Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes *Frontières humaines* (Paris: Edition du Carrefour) in 1929. The only other photographs reproduced were the illustrations made for Lisa Deharme's *Le Coeur de pic* (Paris: Edition José Corti) in 1937.
16. The title, *Aveux non avenues*, is translated in various ways, but my own preference is something like "Confessions Null and Void," or "Voided Confessions." Such a translation affirms the equivocal status of the textual "I," and militates against the tendency to take any of the contents of the book as straightforwardly "confessional."
17. Under her given name of Lucy Schwob, her translation of Ellis's *La Femme dans la Société*, vol. 1 of *L'hygiène sociale: Etudes de psychologie* appeared in *Le Mercure de France* in 1929. Discourses about homosexuality, as they emerged in the post-World War I period, were as various as the gay subcultures that existed at the time. Ellis's notion of a "third sex" was one such formulation, but also influential was Karl Ulrichs' designation of homosexuals as "Uranians," a term Cahun also employed.
18. Among some of her most striking and confrontational self-representations are those where she is made-up and costumed in the part of Elle in Albert Birot's *Barbe-Bleue* (1929). Although it is unclear whether these are the same, Cahun's "Heroines" includes the figure of Beauty among its protagonists.

19. Monique Wittig, “One Is Not Born a Woman,” in Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 13.
20. Several of these vignettes were published in *Le Mercure de France* and *Le Journal Littéraire* in 1925. All are written in the first-person singular somewhat in the manner of dramatic monologues, and some are dedicated to Cahun’s friends.
21. One is irresistibly reminded of André Breton’s confession, “Benjamin Péret et moi-même avons été les seuls a déclaré que nous évitons autant que possible, hors de l’état d’érection, d’être vus nus par une femme, ceci entraînant pour nous certains idées d’indignité.” (Benjamin Péret and I were the only ones to say that we avoided, as much as possible, being seen nude by a woman when we did not have an erection, since this seemed undignified to us), André Breton, *Les Vases communicants* (Paris: Gallimard), 49.
22. From the mid–1920s on, Cahun staged and created photographs of assembled objects, and she participated in the 1936 “Exposition Surréaliste des objets.” In addition, she published an article in a special number of *Cahiers d’art* titled “Prenez Garde des objets domestiques” (Be careful of domestic objects).
23. An important discussion of the surrealist predilection for images of headless or otherwise mutilated female bodies is Mary Ann Caws, “Ladies Shot and Painted: Female Embodiment in Surrealist Art,” in *The Female Body in Western Culture*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986). See also the essay by Suleiman, “Dialogue and Double Allegiance: Some Contemporary Women Artists and the Historical Avant-Garde,” in Chadwick, *Mirror Images*.
24. Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 31.
25. Jacques Lacan, “From Love to Libido,” *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 193.
26. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 231. Cited in the excellent essay by Elizabeth Lebovici, “I Am in Training Don’t Kiss Me,” in *Claude Cahun: Photographe*.
27. Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” 25.
28. *Ibid.*, 20–21.
29. *Ibid.*, 21.
30. *Ibid.*, 18.





# 5

## A FEW NOTES ON MAYA DEREN

Jonas Mekas

I am thinking about Maya Deren. More specifically, I am thinking about images of Maya Deren herself, as she presented herself in her films and photographs. And I am thinking about myself, how do I present myself in my diary films? All my films are basically about myself. The way I see it, whenever I film my friends, the world around me, I try to be as casual in my filming as possible. But as I am rereading my films, my film diaries, I notice that whenever I film or allow others to film me, I begin to act. I assume one or another persona. I am this, and I am that, and I am again someone else. I am clowning, I am posing, I am hamming. But in every one of those cases I am projecting myself into a persona, a role I never really was but many times I wanted to be.

Maya was much more serious than I am. Or, rather, when necessary she could look at things with more detachment. One of the strongest disagreements between Maya and myself had to do with this detachment. Maya was totally against improvisational, spontaneous, diaristic cinema. A film, every detail of it, had to be planned with utmost seriousness. When I now think about Maya's images of herself, I know that they were all carefully planned. Still, I think that on that careful, calculated mental level, she was doing much the same thing as I, or Cindy Sherman, or Claude Cahun. She was projecting herself into imaginary selves. I say imaginary, but in reality those were, or are, the many real selves of Maya Deren. The only difference, a tiny one, is that while Claude and Cindy go through different and drastic surface changes in their self-representations, bridging generations, ages, and centuries, Maya stuck very closely to who she was in real life. Instead of changing her makeup, she changed the context, the

background, the story. Her makeup alterations were slight, but essential. As a matter of fact, Maya would improvise in real life, during her famous New Year parties, assuming more extreme impersonations than any that we see in her films and photographs. She had a collection of exotic dresses to help her. But all of these slightly different personae or impersonations together made up one Maya: an intellectual, inquisitive soul of Maya in search of something, and that something could have been anything, including the Holy Grail.

Actually, in all three cases—Maya, Cindy, and Claude—the artists create a complex network of impersonations, and we drift with them. No one persona is the real Maya or the real Cindy or the real Claude: they are, in effect, all real. They are all different petals of the same lotus flower.

It was in 1953 that I first met Maya. I was searching for a copy of *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film*, a little book, or what Maya called a chap-book, which she had published in 1946. I couldn't find it anywhere, not even at Gotham Book Mart, the publisher of the book. Because I had been told that it was the most intelligent attack on the documentary film form, and a key to the understanding of Deren's films, I became obsessed with finding it.

Most of the people I spoke with about the *Anagram* shook their heads: the book was far above their heads. I have to add that, even today, Maya's book, which undoubtedly ranks with the three or five most important pieces of writing on cinema ever published, is still approached by most film anthologists with the same kind of fear and trembling.

Finally, a friend who knew Maya suggested that I call her and borrow a copy of the book from her directly. I was just a young nobody from Lithuania: a displaced person, a so-called immigrant. After four years of "living" in the postwar displaced person camps, I was brought to the United States by the United Nations Refugee Organization. I was living at that time on 95 Orchard Street, an escapee from two years in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. I had such great respect for Maya that I felt it was almost sacrilegious to bother her with such a request. But I had no other choice. I was obsessed with the need to read the *Anagram*. So I called her and asked if I could borrow a copy of the book. She sounded surprised but said, "Of course, I'll lend it to you."

I went to Maya's Morton Street apartment, in Greenwich Village. As I was climbing up to the third floor, or was it the fourth, I looked up and there at the top of the stairs, like in her film "Meshes of the Afternoon," stood (fortunately, with no knife) a bushy-haired woman, peering at me with her big eyes. She stared at me so intently that against my best judgment (for fear of being impolite) I had to ask her, "Is anything wrong?" "No," she said, "no, only that you looked so much like Sasha that I was sort of in shock."

That's how Maya and I met. As in some of her films, I was transformed by Maya into somebody else. I dissolved into Sasha—Alexander Hammid—her second husband from whom she had separated a few years earlier. Thanks to my resemblance to him, however, Maya and I became friends instantaneously. Despite my ritualistic transformation on the stairs, our relationship remained always intellectual, or down to earth, two souls who met and recognized each

other and remained together to help each other. We argued, we disagreed, but we always remained friends. Sexually we were completely somewhere else. During that period sex didn't exist for me: I was totally immersed in poetry. In addition to that, I had a feeling that Maya was beyond sex. She was, to me, sort of androgynous. Despite her bohemian reputation, Maya was located somewhere beyond sex. Actually, I thought it was her bohemianism that betrayed her real ultra-sexuality. She was a woman, but she was also something else because she was an artist. She was embraced by the gods. Not unlike Claude and Cindy.

Of course, I never had a chance to meet Claude Cahun. My first introduction to her work came during a torrential rain in Naples, in 1994. I was sitting in the studio of Giuseppe Zevola and drinking my morning espresso when I heard water dripping. I discovered that Zevola's roof was leaking, and the rain was falling on a book on a nearby table. I picked up the book, and luckily it was only slightly wet. It was a copy of *Aveux non avenues* inscribed, on the front page, by Claude to André Breton. Zevola picked it up by chance, a few months earlier, from a street book vendor. He had promised to send it to the Musée d'Art Moderne for Claude's first big Paris show. By saving that book from destruction, I felt somehow that I was given a connection to Claude. When later I saw Claude's show in Paris, I thought I understood her and loved her, the same as I think I understand Cindy and I love Cindy—me, the obsessed diarist who I think doesn't really know anything about the ways of real humans. And because I thought there was also a connection between Claude and Cindy, I sent a copy of Claude Cahun's Paris show catalog to Cindy. That was in 1995.

But let us return to Maya.

She was strong, but she was also fragile and even helpless at times. Since my brother Adolfas and I admired her, we became very close friends. We helped her at her yearly screenings, organizing the technical part of her lecture series at the Living Theater, and at one time even running her Creative Foundation office on Morton Street (down the street from where she lived). Adolfas practically became her chauffeur, driving her around the city in a Jeep, which, coincidentally, we had purchased from Sasha Hammid, without knowing that he was once married to Maya.

On her part, Maya acted like my mother. She even tried to be a matchmaker, searching for a suitable wife for me—and she almost found one, although not quite. But that is another story. During her last year of life, Maya, Teiji (her young third husband), Adolfas, and I saw each other at least once a week. It seems strange, but I do not remember any “memorable,” “intellectual” discussions together. It was all talk about what had to be done for the next event, or else about what we had seen, or our friends, or memories of Europe—and Adolfas and I used to go home all excited and not be able to sleep half the night. And then we would wake up and forget it all and another day would begin.

We also used to play drums together. Maya and Teiji had some drums in their apartment, and Maya would put on exotic dresses and dance. I think



Figure 5.1 Alexander Hammid and Maya Deren, film still from *Meshe of the Afternoon*, 1943. Inscribed by Maya Deren to Jonas Mekas, 1959

Adolfas also danced but I was too shy. Maya used to practically transform herself into some kind of gypsy, dancing for hours on end with a wildness and excitement and also a total seriousness.

That's the kind of relationship we had. Adolfas was always there, and his relationship with Maya was slightly different from mine. During that period he was very involved in reading cards. He was telling the past and future, but especially the present. He believed that the best test of card reading was to describe the present. That's what got Maya. Maya had an incredible, almost fatalistic faith in Adolfas' card reading ability. And it was not based on what he was telling her about the past or the future: it had to do with what he told her about her present state, her relationship with Teiji, and her work.

Now, looking back in my memory, remembering it all in glimpses, in single frames, I see Maya's face, always very intense, never making small talk. There was always a very special subtle laugh behind that intensity, which would come out in brief spurts. Those who didn't see this lighter side usually were a little bit frightened by Maya. The intensity is reflected in all of Maya's faces, in her films. The exception perhaps is one of her most frequently reproduced images: Maya as a face from Botticelli (*fig. 5.1*). Curiously, though, that image was filmed and "directed" by Sasha Hammid, and I think it represents his dream of Maya: he threw her back to the Renaissance. All the other faces of Maya are rich with the reverberations of twentieth-century modern art.

As for Adolfas and me, I have to admit that we did not exactly identify ourselves with Maya as an artist. Our friendship had little to do with her art. We liked her intensity and her activism as the spokeswoman for avant-garde films. As for ourselves, we felt that we were from a different, postwar generation. Although I was thirty when I met Maya, and Adolfas twenty-seven, we both felt psychologically like teenagers. The war, the forced labor, and the displaced person camps had taken away a full decade from our lives. One would think that because of all that we had gone through it should have been just the opposite; it should have aged us by a decade. But not in our case. For us, the day we left our home we got suspended in the middle of an unfinished dream. We froze as if someone had placed us in a time capsule to awaken a decade later in New York City, in 1949. Thus Maya, who in reality was only five years older than me, was seen by us as old, old, old. She was already part of film history, whereas we had just entered its ring of fire.

Still, we were very close to each other. There were all kinds of intellectual and exile reverberations between Maya and the two of us. After all, she was born only a stone's throw away from our village. The distance between Kiev, birthplace of Maya Deren, and Semeniskiai, where Adolfas and I were born, is about the same as the distance between New York and Poughkeepsie. Maya needed friends and conversation. She liked us, I don't know why.

As far as her films went, to us they were part of the classic cinema. We admired them in the same way that we admired the films of Man Ray or Hans Richter, Jean Cocteau or Marcel Duchamp. But we were waiting for something that would come from our generation. For me, that something happened with Stan Brakhage's first New York show in 1956 at the 100th Street Living Theater space. Suddenly I felt here was the cinema that touched the deepest nerves of my sensibility: it was electrifying. It was no longer just a continuation of the '20s or '30s cinema. It had nothing to do with symbolism, surrealism, or classic, eternal esthetic values. It was all about the filmmaker himself, standing almost naked in front of us.

It was always a very sensitive subject with Maya: the surrealists, the twenties. Any reference, in the press, or in real life discussions, to her work as containing elements of surrealism made Maya mad. And I think she had a right to be mad. I think that surrealism was imposed upon Maya by Sasha who was the comaker of her first film, *Mesbes of the Afternoon*. When Maya began making her own films, they turned toward ritual and away from surrealism. Although she was educated in Europe, in the classical tradition, in her films after *Mesbes* she was searching desperately for an alternative, trying to get away from that crowd that was still surrounding her. All the surrealists and dadaists had converged on New York, and she was looking for an escape into something else. You can see that in her face, in *At Land* especially (*fig. 5.2*). She never got to that something else. But she made a huge leap for it in *Choreography for Camera*, a leap across space and time. She landed on the shores of an ocean and froze there, intensely gazing into the future just before the cultural explosion of the '50s and '60s.



[ 1 ]



[ 2 ]



[ 3 ]

**Figure 5.2** Maya Deren, three film stills from *At Land*, 1944. Photo: Arunas

# MAYA DEREN

## Plate 21

Alexander Hammid  
Untitled (Maya Deren)

c. 1943

black-and-white photograph



**Plate 22**

Alexander Hammid and Maya Deren

Untitled (Maya Deren)

c. 1942–1943

black-and-white photograph





**Plate 23** (*top*)  
Alexander Hammid and Maya Deren  
Untitled (Maya Deren)  
c. 1942–1943  
black-and-white photograph



**Plate 24** (*right*)  
Alexander Hammid and Maya Deren  
Untitled (Alexander Hammid)  
c. 1942–1943  
black-and-white photograph

**Plate 25** (*bottom right*)  
Alexander Hammid and Maya Deren  
film still from *Meshes of the Afternoon*, 1943  
known as the “Botticelli image”  
of Maya Deren



**Plate 26**

Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid  
six film stills from *Mesbes of the Afternoon*  
1943



Plate 27  
Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid  
six film stills from *Mesbes of the Afternoon*  
1943



**Plate 28**  
Maya Deren  
film still from *At Land*  
1944





**Plate 29**  
Maya Deren  
six film stills from *At Land*  
1944



**Plate 30**  
Maya Deren  
three film stills from *At Land*  
1944



**Plate 31**  
Maya Deren  
film still from *Ritual in Transfigured Time*  
1945–1946



**Plate 32**  
Maya Deren  
film still from *Ritual in Transfigured Time*  
1945–1946

**Plate 33**  
Maya Deren  
film still from *Ritual in Transfigured Time*  
1945–1946





**Plate 34**  
Maya Deren  
four film stills from *Ritual in Transfigured Time*  
1945–1946

**Plate 35**

Maya Deren

*The Bride*

film still and final image from *Ritual in Transfigured Time*

1945–1946





**Plate 36**  
Maya Deren  
Untitled (Haitian Vodou ceremony)  
n.d. (late 1940s to early 1950s)  
modern black-and-white photograph printed from the original negative

**Plate 37**

Maya Deren

Untitled (Haitian ceremonial dance)

n.d. (late 1940s to early 1950s)

modern black-and-white photograph printed from the original negative





**Plate 38**  
Maya Deren  
Untitled (Sea ceremony for Agwé)  
n.d. (late 1940s to early 1950s)  
modern black-and-white photograph printed from the original negative

**Plate 39**

Maya Deren

Untitled (Possession)

n.d. (late 1940s to early 1950s)

film still from Haitian footage, edited posthumously as *Divine Horsemen*





**Plate 40**  
Maya Deren  
Untitled (Possession)  
n.d. (late 1940s to early 1950s)  
modern black-and-white photograph printed from the original negative

# 6

## CINDY SHERMAN: AN INVENTION FOR TWO VOICES

Ted Mooney

**Q** Could you describe the image, please?

**A** The image—it's a photograph, right?—the image depicts a young woman, blond, maybe twenty-two, twenty-three (*fig. 6.1*). She's wearing a skirted suit, light-colored, that looks like something from the late 1950s or early '60s—



**Figure 6.1** Cindy Sherman, *Untitled film still (#4)*, 1977, black-and-white photograph

fabric-covered buttons, knee-length hemline, high lapels—and she’s standing in the hallway of an apartment building or maybe a motel, one ear pressed against a door. Eavesdropping, it looks like.

Q Anything else?

A The hallway is quite dimly lit and, I don’t know, cheap looking—no embellishments of any kind, unless you count the carpeting, which is probably made of some indestructible synthetic fiber, ugly but functional. Also there’s something on the floor near the woman’s feet—like a telephone book but not really. It’s a pretty bleak scene.

Q What do you think is going on?

A Going on?

Q In the image.

A Well, I mean it’s pretty obviously posed. What’s going on is that a photo is being taken.

Q Any other possibilities?

A I guess it could be from the movies—a still. The woman looks a little like Monica Vitti in an Antonioni film. *L’Avventura* comes to mind.

Q Good. Let’s stay with that. [Turns on recording device.] So if it were a film still, what would be happening in the film?

A The woman is a Rumanian named Krysha . . . Krysha something. She works for an international pharmaceutical company based in Germany, and she has recently been brought to the States—New Jersey, actually—to help with product development there. Her English is good and getting better because she is having an affair with her supervisor, Stanley. He’s married, of course. So what we see here is a date gone wrong. Krysha has arrived at the motel early, but Stanley, it seems, is even earlier. Krysha is just about to knock when she hears a woman’s voice inside. The woman and Stanley are talking—arguing, rather—but Krysha can’t quite make out the words. She’s not sure what to do. If it’s a choice between her lover and her job, there’s no contest. But still, she’s very fond of Stanley. Maybe it’s not what it seems.

Q You appear to know this woman quite well.

A Know her? This is just a photograph. I mean, she’s not real, is she? [Pauses.] What is it we’re doing here exactly?

Q Perhaps you’d like to sit down. You seem . . .

A I’m quite comfortable, thank you.

Q What do you think is the most important historical development of the last decade?

A The death of Communism, definitely. And the triumph of the market economy. Consumerism, I suppose, is what I mean.



Figure 6.2 Cindy Sherman, Untitled film still (#83), 1980, black-and-white photograph

Q How does it work, consumerism?

A We create appetites we don't have for things we don't need and then spend our lives pursuing them. Advertising is a big help here. The Image.

Q And that works, as a strategy?

A Of course. It creates choices, and choices are sexy. Nobody wants to be just what he or she already is. Do you?

Q No, I suppose not. [Sighs.] Do you mind if I take off my shoes?

Q You seem particularly drawn to that one. Number 83 (*fig. 6.2*).

A Yes. Shall I describe it?

Q If you don't mind.

A Another young woman, possibly the same one that was in the motel (except her hair is dark this time), is hurrying away from what looks like a public building—marble, an arched doorway, a red No Parking sign. Well, it's a black-and-white image, but you can tell the sign is one of those red don't-mess-with-us signs, which probably means the building is governmental—a courthouse, maybe. Anyway, the woman seems upset. She's holding a magazine away from her body, as if something she has just read in it disturbs her, and she is holding the other hand up to her face in distress. Or maybe she's trying to hide her face, because she does seem to be more or less incognito, wearing a belted trench coat, although it's not raining, and dark sunglasses. It's also striking that she has belted the trench coat tightly and has actually *threaded the sash through the buckle*. Nobody does that. Usually you just tie the sash casually, so that it looks, you know, insouciant. Anyway, all these details make me think that she has just read

about *herself* in the magazine, that she is a celebrity of some kind who has just come out of a court hearing, bought the magazine, and discovered in it a lurid article about herself, a gossipy piece full of lies. Also, there are two photos on the page the magazine is open to, one of them a small bottom-bleed, the other almost a half-page in size. The bigger one seems to be of her, though maybe with blond hair, like the . . . like Krysha. All three women could be the same person.

Q You're quite observant. But is it possible you're reading that in about the magazine photo? I can't make it out at all.

A [Ignores question.] And something else. The way she is framed in the image—by marble walls, the brass railing in the foreground, two small trees on one side—she looks more or less hemmed in. Caught. She's really quite small in relation to her surroundings. In fact, now that I think of it, this looks like a paparazzi shot. But very strictly composed—artful, if you like.

Q You seem to have celebrity on the brain.

A Yes. Celebrity has replaced identity in contemporary Western culture.

Q But how can that be? Not everybody is a celebrity.

A Exactly. Not everybody has an identity. Or rather not everybody has a *fixed* identity. Only the media can make an identity stick, and even then only for a limited period. Fifteen minutes turns out to be rather a long time, now that we've all got the hang of it.

Q Oh, you're witty! Nobody . . . I didn't realize that.

A I try.

Q [Consults notes.] You mention the woman's hair—that it could be the same woman with different hair color, sometimes blond, sometimes not. What are the problematics of blondness?

A The problematics of blondness are a historical phenomenon of no further relevance to the living. To us. They're over.

Q I'm not sure I follow.

A Let me get anecdotal here for a moment. Every day I walk ten or fifteen blocks on lower Broadway, and I see hundreds of young women walking along, too, coming from the other direction. In a week, maybe two or three thousand; over the years, who knows how many. Essentially I've watched an endless river of young women flowing over the glistening rocks of fashion, and, not to put too fine a point on it, they make an instructive spectacle. Beginning around 1980 it became fashionable among these women to dye their hair blond. I'm not talking about "only-her-hairdresser-knows-for-sure" blond; this was brazen, bleached, strike-Mom-dead blond, often with an inch of dark roots showing. In other words, there was no attempt at verisimilitude; these girls only wanted to *refer* to blondness. That the blondness was artificial—or, as we used to say then, *unreal*—didn't matter in the least. If anything, this unreal blondness seemed more compelling, more "informed," than the natural, genetic kind.

Q And now?

A Now this referential blondness has its own reality. It's no longer fake real; it's real fake.

Q Take a few minutes now and look through the rest of the images, the ones in color.

A Actually, while you were out of the room I took the liberty of . . . I've already examined them quite closely.

Q And?

A The overall direction of these images, as a numbered sequence, is away from narrative content. Story is gradually displaced by sensation in its pure state. There are some exceptions, naturally, but that's the overall trend.

Q Toward visual sensation?

A Yes. And away from the fetters of causality. You see the same thing everywhere in the world at large. Terrorism has replaced warfare, for example, because a terrorist act is essentially an image; its purpose is to be disseminated by the media as widely and quickly as possible. Television, computer imaging . . . [Digresses at length.]

Q Do you believe in the artist, as a concept?

A No, no. Not at all.

Q What, then?

A [Flushing] I believe in the Image.

A These mannequin shots, maybe because they're assembled rather than posed for, somehow seem more aggressive. Accusatory, if I may put it that way . . . Like this one. Number 302 (plate 56).

Q You find it unsettling?

A It's repulsive, sort of, but at the same time it draws you in. The image is of a female mannequin seated before a gold brocade backdrop, her legs stretched out before her but bent at the knees so that the soles of her feet touch. Strange posture, ungainly but affecting. And there's a certain glamour to her presence: the silver lamé pants; the black dress over them, falling off her shoulders, soaking up the light; the excessive makeup, already smeared. She emanates a certain kind of ravished sexiness that I associate with fashion magazines. It's the image of a rape victim, to be quite blunt.

Q Whom might she represent, in the fashion context?

A She might, in the fashion context, represent the consumer. I mean, after all, we're not without misgivings about, well, the appetites we arouse in ourselves.

Q And what is the result of these misgivings?

A Further enthrallment. The misgivings are a kind of self-titillation that ultimately heightens the experience of consumption. [Pauses] But maybe I'm being too harsh.

Q [Aside] Tiring, he reveals his own confusion, irritation, anger.

A Anyway, I wasn't done describing the image, which, as I've said, depicts a female mannequin, although the possibility exists that the feet and maybe the eyes of the figure are flesh. Maybe a woman has arranged herself so that her legs, encased in silver lamé, extend from underneath the dress, and her eyes peer out through the eye holes of a mask. Either way, the chest, which is definitely a mannequin's, has been cut open to reveal a second face, upside down, eyes rolled back in their sockets as if she—it, I mean, since the second face also belongs to a mannequin—finds the whole situation exasperating. Or maybe she has passed out. Fainted.

Q Do mannequins faint?

A Well, you see, that's just my point. Our habit of distinguishing between the animate and the inanimate no longer does the job it was meant to do. Not only are people more and more likely to be amalgams of the living and the non-living—how many people do you know with electronic pacemakers, for instance, or contact lenses?—but the distinction itself is becoming obsolete. The self, which is the human invention most cherished by its fabricators, is annexing all sorts of new terrain, augmenting itself, if you will. Daily.

Q Excellent. You've just made our statistics team very happy. Now I'd like you to close your eyes for a few seconds, then open them again and look at the image as if you're seeing it for the first time.

A

Q Have you done it?

A Yes.

Q I'm going to ask you a question. Please answer truthfully.

A Of course.

Q Could you love her?

Q So if I understand you correctly, you're suggesting that as the number of possible selves increases, approaching infinitude, the individual exhibits a proportionate rise in morbidity.

A Yes. Implicit in the generation of multiple selves is the desire to escape death. However, since human beings remain mortal creatures, at least for now, these attempts at evading death (through the generation of selves, I mean) have the paradoxical effect of making death more and more palpable. Like someone trying not to think of the word "elephant," the shape-shifter gravitates inexorably toward what he or she has foresworn—in this case, fixity, i.e., death. Eventually, of course, death sits in your lap.

Q Are you referring to any of these images in particular?

A I'm referring to all of them.

Q Please characterize this image.

A A demented-looking woman in black-and-white stripes has blood on her fingertips (plate 44).

Q This one?

A A homeless woman has died in the park.

Q This one?

A A woman has eaten moldy food and vomited it back up.

Q This one?

A The hag exposes herself.

Q This one?

A The autopsy has been performed.

Q This one?

A Boils on her ass.

Q I sense you have a hidden agenda.

A Not at all. It's neither hidden nor mine.

Q So what is the end of all our strivings?

A The end of all our strivings is withdrawal, gradual or sudden, from the physical envelope. From our bodies.

Q You're referring to death.

A That, too, of course. But I was thinking more of the rapidly decreasing role that the physical world plays in our lives. As less and less remains to be known about the physical world, we move with cheerful abandon into nonphysical loci, places where we are no longer bound by the particularities of the body. Cyberspace, for example. Or what we might call pharmaceutical space. Or . . . the possibilities are actually endless.

Q The movies?

A An excellent example.

A You haven't told me who took these photographs. Images, I mean.

Q We don't know who took them. We know who they're *by*, if it's authorship you're asking about.

A No, come on. Really.

Q [Amused] Who *really* took them? But I thought you were done with "really."

A Coming into town that first night, jet-lagged and hungry, I was amazed to find the entire population dressed up in costume, dancing in the streets. It was carnival. The airline had lost my luggage—or at least sent it temporarily to another continent—so, armed only with my passport and wallet, I waded into the festivities.

Q You had no costume.

A I had no costume. And yet because of the context—i.e., carnival—and because everyone else I encountered was dressed up as somebody or something extraordinary, my own clothes *became* a costume. Surrounded by bears, wizards, princesses, movie stars, and world leaders, I was transformed into someone dressed up as myself. Very unnerving.

Q How so?

A Because if this was my costume, who was I ordinarily? You have to imagine a whole city dressed up in fantasy clothes, even the taxi drivers and maîtres d'. And what's more, I didn't speak the language, so I was completely at the mercy of this costume. Of my Image, as it were.

Q What did you do?

A Surrender. I forgot myself and, whirling and jiggling through this phantasmagoria, I entered into a state of grace.

Q [Roguishly] These images I've been showing you—what, taken collectively, might they have to tell us?

A That the variations are infinite but the prototype nonexistent?

Q Yes, we keep coming back to that, don't we? Over and over. [Removes mask, opens fresh notebook.] Now. Shall we begin?

# CINDY SHERMAN

**Plate 41**  
Cindy Sherman  
Untitled (#93), 1981  
color photograph





Plate 42  
Cindy Sherman  
Untitled (#118), 1983  
color photograph



**Plate 43**  
Cindy Sherman  
Untitled (#131), 1983  
color photograph

**Plate 44**

Cindy Sherman  
Untitled (#138), 1984  
color photograph





Plate 45  
Cindy Sherman  
Untitled (Mrs. Claus), 1990  
color photograph

**Plate 46**

Cindy Sherman  
Untitled (#196), 1989  
color photograph





**Plate 47**  
Cindy Sherman  
Untitled (#225), 1990  
color photograph



**Plate 48**  
Cindy Sherman  
Props used for Plate 47  
color photographs by Phyllis Galemba  
1998

**Plate 49**  
Cindy Sherman  
Untitled (#228), 1990  
color photograph



Plate 50

Cindy Sherman  
Untitled (#224), 1990  
color photograph



**Plate 51**  
Cindy Sherman  
Untitled (#277), 1993  
color photograph





**Plate 52**  
Cindy Sherman  
Untitled (#296), 1994  
color photograph

Plate 53  
Cindy Sherman  
Untitled (#298), 1994  
color photograph



Plate 54  
Cindy Sherman  
Untitled (#304), 1994  
color photograph





**Plate 55**  
Cindy Sherman  
Props used for Plates 54 and 56  
color photographs by Phyllis Galebo  
1998



**Plate 56**  
Cindy Sherman  
Untitled (#302), 1994  
color photograph



## ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

Erin Donnelly

### *Claude Cahun*

Claude Cahun (née Lucy Schwob) was born in 1894 in Nantes, France. Schwob was raised in a prominent Jewish family of writers and publishers. Her grandfather was the publisher of the newspaper *La Phare de la Loire* (The Lighthouse), which her father, Maurice, continued. Her uncle Marcel Schwob was a Symbolist writer and an early influence. In 1913 her parents divorced, and her father soon remarried a woman who was the mother of her friend—Suzanne Malherbe. Her stepsister became her conspirator, collaborator, lesbian lover, and lifelong companion.

Schwob studied at the Sorbonne and Oxford before moving with Malherbe to Paris, where they participated in the intellectual and creative life between World War I and II. In the late 1930s, she was close to André Breton and Henri Michaux, published in surrealist journals, and contributed sculpture-objects to surrealist exhibitions; but for the most part she worked independently of the group. She joined, and signed petitions of, political coalitions like the anti-Fascist l'Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaire (AEAR) and later Contre-attaque, a union of Communist writers, artists, and workers. Her booklet of 1934, *Les Paris sont ouverts*, is still used as a resource for the context of art and politics during those years.

She began creating intimate self-portraits as early as 1912 and continued to produce them alongside her writing, research (she translated into French the work of sexologist Havelock Ellis and Oscar Wilde) and participation in avant-garde theater. Her writing was initially published in the journal *Le Mercure de France*, first in 1914 under the transitional name of Claude Courlis and then in 1917 as Claude Cahun (a family name on the maternal side). In 1930 her book *Aveux non avendus* was published. In 1937 Cahun and Malherbe left the Continent and retired to the Isle of Jersey, where she had spent her summer holidays during childhood. She continued to make self-portraits in her new surroundings as well as to create photographs of object tableaux to illustrate a book of poems by Lise Deharme called *Le Coeur de Pic*. A few years later the island was occupied by the Nazis, and together the couple launched a two-woman covert Resistance operation, for instance posting anonymous slogans that antagonized the German soldiers. They were arrested and sentenced to death by the Gestapo in 1944 but were rescued by Allied forces. Some of Cahun's work was destroyed during the raid on their home, but she continued making photographs until her death there in 1954.

#### Selected Bibliography

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*Le Rêve d'une Ville: Nantes et le Surréalisme*. Ex. cat. Musée des Beaux-Arts et Bibliothèque Municipale de Nantes, 1995.

### Other Works by Claude Cahun

*Aveux non Avenus*. Paris: Editions du Carrefour, 1930. Photomontage collaboration with Marcel Moore (Suzanne Malherbe).

*Les Paris sont ouverts*. Paris: José Corti, 1934.

Deharme, Lise, *Le Coeur de Pic*. Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1937. Poems for children, illustrated with 20 photographs by Cahun.

### Selected Exhibitions

1985

"L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism,"  
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (ex. cat.)

1992

"Claude Cahun,"  
Zabriskie Gallery, New York

1992

"Claude Cahun: 1894–1954: Photomontages from the 1920s and 1930s,"  
Zabriskie Gallery, Paris

1994

"Mise en scène: Claude Cahun, Tacita Dean, Virginia Nimarkoh," Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (ex. cat.)

1995

"Claude Cahun Photographe,"  
Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (ex. cat.)

1997

"Rose is a Rose is a Rose: Gender and Performance in Photography,"  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (ex. cat.)

1997–1998

“Claude Cahun Selbstdarstellungen,” Kunstverein, Munich; Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz; Fotografische Sammlung, Museum Folkwang Essen (ex. cat.)

1998–1999

“Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation,” MIT List Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Miami Art Museum; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (ex. cat.)

## Maya Deren

Maya Deren (née Eleanora Derenkowsky) was born in 1917 in Kiev. Her family of liberal Jewish intellectuals and professionals fled the pogroms of Eastern Europe in 1922 and emigrated to the United States. They moved first to upstate New York and then briefly stayed in Ohio. Her father, a doctor who had served in the Red Army during the Revolution, pursued medical recertification in Syracuse where he then took a position as a psychologist. Young Derenkowsky was an intelligent child who excelled ahead of her age group in academic classes.

In 1930 she entered the League of Nations' International School in Geneva, Switzerland, where she became interested in world affairs. Returning to the United States, Deren (her last name previously shortened by her father) studied journalism at the University of Syracuse and completed her undergraduate degree at New York University. With her first husband she was active in the Socialist Party: serving in the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), organizing and lecturing. During her years in New York she wrote poetry and became interested in photography and modern dance. In 1939 she received a master's degree in English literature from Smith College. While pursuing her degree, she worked as a translator, editorial assistant and secretary to support herself. From 1940 to 1942 she traveled on a national tour with choreographer and dance anthropologist Katherine Dunham. Inspired by work done in the Caribbean by scholars like Dunham, she too wrote theoretically about dance.

At a cocktail party in Los Angeles, Deren was introduced to Alexander (“Sasha”) Hammid, a Czech experimental filmmaker whom she soon married, and who taught her filmmaking skills. Together the newlyweds made *Meshes of the Afternoon* in 1943 in their home. Influenced by *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and the Hindu word for “illusion,” she changed her name to Maya in 1943. Moving back to New York that same year, she and her husband became actively involved in the creative life of Greenwich Village. She worked as a still photographer, producing artists' portraits and interiors for publication. Deren continued making films through the 1940s and 1950s (six were completed), casting her friends, colleagues, and fellow avant-garde artists. During these years she developed an audience for experimental film by writing about film and organizing screenings and lectures that attracted critical attention. Her writing was published in *Dance Magazine*, *Mademoiselle*, *New Directions*, *Partisan*

*Review*, *Screen Writer*, *Popular Photography*, *Movie Makers Magazine*, and the *Village Voice*. At the Cannes Film Festival in 1947 she won the "Grand Prix International for 16mm Film, Experimental Class." That same year, Deren left New York for nine months on a Guggenheim grant to Haiti to study dance ritual. During several subsequent trips to the island, she was initiated into the practices of the Vodou religion. By 1953 she had amassed much film footage but her work in Haiti was instead transformed into a book, called *Divine Horsemen*. Continuing her initiative of promoting experimental film, in 1954 she founded and administrated the Creative Film Foundation while she toured, lectured, and screened her films. Deren died suddenly of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1961 in New York City.

#### Selected Bibliography

Clark, VèVè A. *The Legend of Maya Deren: A Documentary Biography and Works*. Text by VèVè A. Clark, Millicent Hodson, Catrina Neiman; director of photography, Francine Bailey Price; general editor, Hollis Melton. New York: Anthology Film Archives/Film Culture, 1984. Vol. 1, pt. 1, *Signatures* (1917–1942). Vol. 1, pt. 2–3. *Chambers* (1942–1947). Additional volume is due in 1999.

*Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*. Montauk, New York: Mystic Fire Video, 1985. Posthumous videorecording.

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*Witch's Cradle*, 1943 (unfinished)

*At Land*, 1944

*The Private Life of a Cat*, 1945

*A Study in Choreography for Camera*, 1945

*Ritual in Transfigured Time*, 1945

*Meditation on Violence*, 1948

*The Very Eye of Night*, 1952–1959

## Cindy Sherman

Cindy Sherman was born in 1954 in Glen Ridge, New Jersey, and was raised in the suburbs of Long Island. Sherman received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1976 from the State University of New York at Buffalo. She moved to New York City in 1977 and began the "Untitled Film Stills" series in the late 1970s. In the early 1980s she retreated to her studio to work with rear screen projections. On commission from *Artforum* in 1981, Sherman produced a series of horizontal images she called "Centerfolds," self-representations resembling the two-page spreads of pornographic magazines. During the 1980s and 1990s, Sherman received commercial commissions from fashion designers. Not only did this kind of work increase her visibility in terms of circulation, it also allowed her work to cross the boundaries into the mass media. In the mid-1980s she produced the "Fairy Tales" and "Disaster" series; in the 1990s, the "History Portraits" and the "Sex Pictures." During this time Cindy Sherman substituted dolls and prosthetic body parts for self-portraits. Her horror film *Office Killer* was released late in 1997.

While her life as an artist has been rather private, her work has gained global recognition through exhibitions at major museums and galleries. In the past years, Sherman has had 85 solo shows and has been included in countless group exhibitions. In addition, there is a vast collection of critical writing on the artist and her work. She has received a number of awards including a National Endowment for the Arts grant and the prestigious John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur award.

### Selected Bibliography

*Cindy Sherman*. Ex. cat. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1982.

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*Cindy Sherman*. Ex. cat. Museum of Modern Art, Shiga, Japan; Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art, Japan; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo. Shiga, Japan: Museum of Modern Art, 1996. With essays by Amelia Arenas, Chika Mori, Aiko Obigane, Sachiko Osaki, interview by Noriko Fuku.

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### Other Works by Cindy Sherman

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*Office Killer*. Good Machine and Kardana/Swinsky Films, 1997. Film and video direction for feature film starring Molly Ringwald, Carol Kane, Jeanne Tripplehorn, Barbara Sukowa.

### Selected Exhibitions

1978

"Four Artists," Artists Space, New York (ex. cat.)

1979

Hallwalls, Buffalo, New York

1980

Metro Pictures, New York

1982–1984

"Cindy Sherman," The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Gewad Gallery, Ghent, Belgium; Watershed Gallery, Bristol, England; John Hansard Gallery, University of Southampton, England; Palais Stutterheim, Erlangen, West Germany; Haus am Waldsee, West Berlin; Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva; Sonja Heine-Niels Onstadt Foundation, Copenhagen; Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek, Denmark (ex. cat.)

1987

"Cindy Sherman," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; The Dallas Museum of Art (ex. cat.)

1996

"Cindy Sherman," Museum of Modern Art, Shiga, Japan; Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art, Japan; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo. (ex. cat.)

1997

"Cindy Sherman: The Complete Untitled Film Stills," Museum of Modern Art, New York.

1997–2000

"Cindy Sherman Retrospective," Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Barbican Art Gallery, London; capc Musée, Bordeaux; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (ex. cat.)

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Lynn Gumpert** is the Director of the Grey Art Gallery at New York University. She was senior curator at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York and adjunct curator for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. She has also organized exhibitions in Europe and Asia and has written for publications including *Art in America*, *ARTnews*, and *Parkett*. Her monograph on the French artist Christian Boltanski was published by Flammarion in 1992.

**Lucy R. Lippard** is a writer and activist who was based in New York from 1958 to 1993 and now lives in New Mexico. She was a cofounder of the Ad Hoc Women Artists Committee, WEB, and *Heresies* and is the author of *From the Center* and *The Pink Glass Swan* (both anthologies of essays on women's art). Her most recent books are *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (The New Press, 1997) and *On the Beaten Track: Essays on Tourism, Art and Place* (The New Press, 1999).

**Norman MacAfee** has translated (with Luciano Martinengo) Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Poems* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996), two volumes of Jean-Paul Sartre's letters (*Witness to My Life* and *Quiet Moments in a War*, Scribner/Penguin-U.K.), and Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (with Lee Fahnestock). *The Death of the Forest*, his opera set to the music of Charles Ives, about King Philip's War, will premiere at Mechanics Hall in Worcester, Massachusetts, in April 2000. A book of his poems, *A New Requiem*, is available from Segue Distributors.

**Jonas Mekas** is a filmmaker, writer, editor-in-chief of *Film Culture* magazine and, since 1970, the program director and president of Anthology Film Archives in New York City. His publications include *Movie Journal*, *I Had Nowhere to Go*, *There Is no Ithaca*, and articles for *The New York Times*, *The Village Voice*, *Cahiers du Cinema*, and *Film Quarterly*. His films, like *Walden*, *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*, *He Stands in a Desert Counting the Seconds of His Life*, and *Scenes from the Life of George Maciunas*, have been shown and won prizes in film festivals around the world since the early 1960s.

**Ted Mooney** is a writer whose most recent novel is *Singing into the Piano* (Knopf 1998; Vintage 1999). He is also a senior editor at *Art in America*.

**Shelley Rice**, a New York-based critic, historian, and curator, teaches at New York University and the School of Visual Arts. She has published numerous book, catalog, magazine, and newspaper essays in the United States and abroad, and was the cocurator, with photographer Sandi Fellman, of the Avon Products, Inc. collection of contemporary women's photography, shown in 1997 at the International Center of Photography in an exhibition titled "Eye of the Beholder." Her book *Parisian Views* was published by The MIT Press in 1997.

**Abigail Solomon-Godeau** is Professor of Art History at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She is the author of *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practice* (University of Minnesota Press, 1991) and *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (Thames and Hudson, 1997).



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